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Faculty & Staff Perceptions of Challenges to Growth and Meeting Student Population Needs

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FACULTY & STAFF PERCEPTIONS OF CHALLENGES TO GROWTH AND
MEETING STUDENT POPULATION NEEDS

A Dissertation
Presented to
the Graduate School of
Clemson University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy
Curriculum & Instruction

by
Horace Justin Ballenger
May 2015

Accepted by:
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ABSTRACT

In this multi-case study the researcher explored the specific challenges faced by four rural/town South Carolina elementary schools as perceived by the faculty, staff, and administration at those schools. The researcher examined how those perceived challenges were addressed in each school. The results of this study do not represent a generalization of all schools in South Carolina with similar demographic make-ups. Rather than provide generalizable data, the results of this study provide a detailed analysis of the school climate, *Strengths*, and *Areas for Improvement* as perceived by the faculty, staff, and administration at the schools that participated in this study.

The participating schools were selected from rural/town areas of South Carolina based on geographic location, demographic data, and state reported school ratings. The researcher evaluated the schools chosen for this study to ensure that demographic data in terms of proportions of racial/ethnic minority students and poverty levels were similar. The student populations for all of the schools included in the study were predominantly low-income students and students of color.

DEDICATION

This study is dedicated to
The Children Attending South Carolina's Rural Schools
And The Villages That Are Raising Them

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This journey has helped me to grow and expand my perspective of life and the world we are all blessed to live in. I must first acknowledge my creator who makes all things possible and empowered me to transform this dream into a reality. To my wife, Hope, you are my muse. You make me feel like I can do anything. I am so blessed to have your love and support. I cherish all that you are and I thank God that we chose each other.

My children, Justin “JB” and Veronica, you are a light to me. During my darkest moments I am inspired to keep going because of you. May both of you grow up to realize your dreams and leave the world better than you find it. Out of all of my accomplishments you are what I am most proud of. To my parents, Bobby and Dorothy Ballenger, thank you for training me up in the way I should go. The lessons you both taught me through your example prepared me for life and success. Thank you for the countless sacrifices you made for your children and for loving us unconditionally. To my other set of parents, Steven and Audrey Miller, thank you for treating me like a son and entrusting me with your daughter. I am grateful for all the love, wisdom, and support you have given to our family. To all of my brothers and sisters, thank you for all of the encouragement and support you have given. To the rest of my family and the village that raised me, I can never repay the debt I owe to everyone who has enriched my life. I hope that through my life and career I can make a significant contribution to the benefit of our village.

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There are certainly no coincidences. There is great purpose in all of the relationships we are able to form and I am most grateful for all of the relationships that have enriched my life and assisted me in making it to this point.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Statement of the Problem

By 2043, current Census projections indicate that the majority of Americans will be ethnic minorities (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). As demographics in the United States continue to shift, there is growing alarm regarding the persistence of the academic achievement gap children who are ethnic minorities and those with low socio-economic status exhibit. National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) data show that a negative correlation exists between high rates of poverty and minority enrollment and academic achievement levels. Some scholars contend that the achievement gap poses a significant threat to economic prosperity and national security in the United States (Darling-Hammond, 2010, pp. 8-18; Harris & Harrington, 2006).

Although research regarding the achievement gap is largely focused on urban schools, a significant proportion of ethnic minority and poor children attend low-income rural/town K-12 public schools (Toldson et al., 2006; Williams, 2003). About one in four ethnic minorities attending K-12 public schools attends a town/rural school. Those data also show that significant portions of rural/town K-12 public schools, particularly in the southeastern and southwestern United States have majority ethnic minority student populations and poverty rates that exceed 90% (NCES, 2013). Gaining greater knowledge of the unique dynamics that effect academic achievement

in such schools may have a significant role in determining methods for eliminating the achievement gap in all of America's schools (REFC, 2013; Toldson et al., 2006; Coffee & Obringer, 2004).

1.2 Purpose of the Study

This study investigated the specific challenges faced by four rural/town South Carolina elementary schools as perceived by the faculty, staff, and administration at those schools. This study also examined how the perceived challenges were addressed in each school. The results of this study do not represent a generalization of all schools in South Carolina with similar demographic make-ups. Rather than provide a generalization of similar schools, this study provides a detailed analysis of the school climate and of school strengths and weaknesses as perceived by the faculty, staff, and administration at the schools that participated in this study.

1.3 Significance of the Study

Research related to schools with high proportions of minority students and students of poverty largely focuses on urban schools (REFC, 2013; Toldson et al., 2006; Williams, 2003). Given the dearth of literature that exists related to rural/town schools with high minority enrollments and high rates of poverty, findings from studies such as this one can assist researchers in parsing the achievement gap in schools with those demographics. The findings of this study may also be utilized to inform both the practice of education and education policy.

1.4 Research Questions

Research questions were designated based on the methods used to explore and compare the data obtained during this study. The following research questions were explored for the four participating schools:

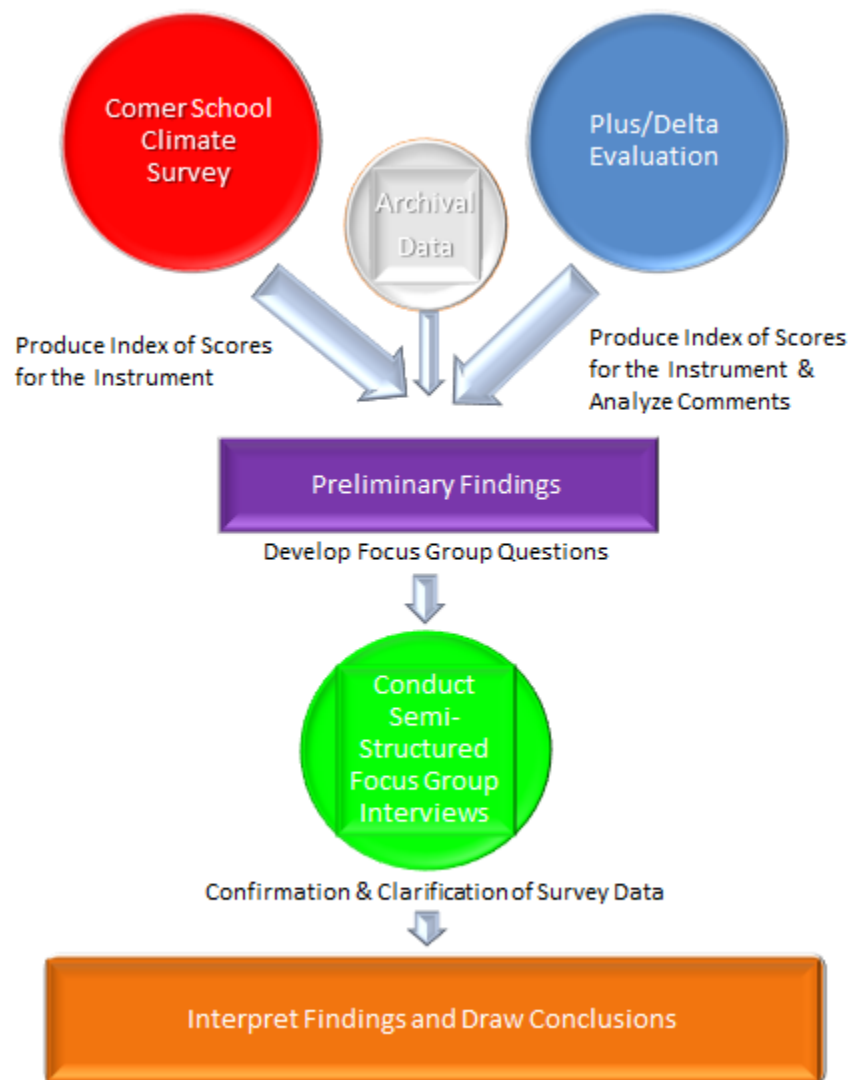
1. What challenges to students' academic performance were identified by participants' responses on the Plus/Delta Evaluation and *Comer School Climate Survey*?
2. How do study participants characterize their schools' strengths and areas for improvement and/or change?
3. How do the results compare for both schools that participated in this study?

1.5 Research Methodology

For this study, the researcher obtained detailed and in-depth data about four rural/town elementary schools in upstate South Carolina. All of the schools had similar demographic make-ups; however, one pair of schools achieved significantly higher academic achievement outcomes than the other pair. Data on the schools was used to gain insight into factors such as school climate; and faculty, staff, and administration members' perceptions of their schools' strengths and weakness related to supporting the students' academic achievement. The researcher employed a mixed-methods design to conduct a comparative analysis of the schools.

Figure 1.5.1 provides a visual model of the research design for this study.

Figure 1.5.1: Model of Research Design



In each school the researcher collected archival data and also collected data using the *Comer School Climate Survey* and *Plus/Delta Evaluation*. Following preliminary analysis of both surveys, the results of both surveys were analyzed and constituted the preliminary findings. The preliminary findings in each school were used to develop focus

group questions. The researcher then conducted semi-structured focus group interviews to provide confirmation and clarification of the survey data. Following confirmation and clarification of the data, the researcher conducted a comparative analysis of the data to understand what similarities and differences existed among the schools in terms of school climate and faculty, staff, and administration members' perceptions of their schools' strengths and weakness related to supporting the students' academic achievement. The results of the comparative analysis were used to draw conclusions and construct a conceptual framework outlining the likely reasons for the differences in academic achievement exhibited among the participating schools based on the data that was collected.

1.6 Definitions of Terminology

Achievement Gap

“Refers to the observed, persistent disparity of educational measures between the performance of groups of students, especially groups defined by socioeconomic status (SES), race/ethnicity” (Carnoy & Rothstein, 2013).

Opportunity Gap

In short, according to Haveman, the education debt is the accumulation of opportunity deficits that have persisted throughout the history of America for historically marginalized groups (Ladson-Billing, 2006).

Comer School Development Program (CSDP)

A school development program and model designed by Dr. James P. Comer, professor of Child Psychology at the Yale School of Medicine.

Fairness

The equal treatment of students regardless of ethnicity and socioeconomic status

Historically Marginalized Groups

Refers to groups that have historically experienced discrimination based socioeconomic status and ethnicity.

Order and Discipline

Appropriateness of student behavior in the school setting

Palmetto Assessment of State Standards (PASS) Exam

The standardized exam administered to students attending South Carolina's public schools in grades 3-8.

Parent Involvement

Frequency of parent participation in school activities

Poverty Index (PI)

Refers to the percent of students in whose family income qualifies them for free or reduced lunch.

Rural

Census-defined rural territory that is less than or equal to 5 miles from an urbanized area:

Includes three geographic groupings: *Fringe* (2.5 mi. or fewer from an urban cluster), *Distant* (2.6 mi. – 10 mi. from an urban cluster), *Remote* (>10 mi. from an urban cluster)

(Office of Management and Budget, 2000)

School Climate

A multi-dimensional construct that includes physical, social, and academic dimensions of a school (Comer, 2001)

Sharing of Resources

Equal student opportunity to participate in school activities, materials, and equipment

Suburb

Territory outside a principal city and inside an urbanized area:

Includes three population groupings: *Large* (250,000+), *Midsized* (100,000+), *Small* (>100,000)

(Office of Management and Budget, 2000)

Student Interpersonal Relations

The levels of caring, respect, and trust that exists among students in the school

Student-Teacher Relations

The level of caring, respect, and trust that exists between students and teachers in the school

Urban/City

Territory inside an urbanized area and inside a principal city:

Includes three population groupings: *Large* (250,000+), *Midsize* (100,000+), *Small* (< 100,000)

(Office of Management and Budget, 2000)

Town

Territory inside an urban cluster:

Includes three geographic groupings: *Fringe* (10 mi. or fewer from and urbanized area), *Distant* (11 mi. – 35 mi. from and urbanized area), *Remote* (>35 mi. from an urbanized area)

(Office of Management and Budget, 2000)

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction

The demographics of the United States are shifting rapidly. By 2043, the United States Census Bureau (2013) data project that the majority of people living in the United States will be ethnic minorities. As demographics in the United States continue to shift, there is growing concern regarding the persistence of the academic achievement gap that exists in regards to ethnic minorities and lower socio-economic status as compared to affluent White children. Some scholars contend that the achievement gap poses a significant threat to economic prosperity and national security in the United States (Darling-Hammond, 2010, pp. 8-18; Harris & Harrington, 2006). Although most research regarding the achievement gap is focused on urban schools, a significant proportion of ethnic minority children attend low-income town/rural K-12 public schools (Toldson et al., 2006; Williams, 2003). United States Census Bureau (2013) data show that 23.9% of minority children attending K-12 public schools attend town/rural schools. Within town/rural schools with high proportions of minority and poor students, there may exist dynamics, which differ from those in urban with similar demographic proportions, that influence students' academic achievement (Toldson et al., 2006; Coffee & Obring, 2004).

2.2 Examining the Achievement Gap

The term achievement gap is used frequently in reference to the difference in academic achievement (commonly observed with standardized test scores) between affluent White children and children of different racial and socioeconomic backgrounds (Dudley-Marling, 2007). Scholars view the achievement gap as a consequence of systematic prejudice and discrimination towards ethnic minorities and the poor, which has historically limited educational attainment, economic development, and socio-political influence for people belonging to those groups (Ladson-Billings, 2006). Since the advent of the modern Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s, the achievement gap in American schools has been widely researched (Harris & Harrington, 2006). The reasons for the persistence of the achievement gap are a source of intense debate as a matter of education research and policy (Sleeter, 2004; Noguera & Yonemura-Wing, 2006).

2.3 Implications of the Coleman Report

Perhaps the most influential study regarding the achievement gap is “Equality of Educational Opportunity,” commonly referred to as the Coleman Report, published in 1966 (Jamenez-Castellanos, 2012; Olivios, 2006). The Coleman Report investigated survey data taken from 600,000 students and over 60,000 education professionals, from more than 3,000 schools from across the United States, to determine the root causes of the achievement gap observed between poor mostly Black children and middle-class White children. The researchers who conducted the study concluded that a student’s

background and socioeconomic status had greater bearing on academic achievement than differences in school funding levels and available resources (Coleman et al., 1966; Borman & Dowling, 2010). Although several researchers have disputed the Coleman Report's findings, the study has undoubtedly influenced education policy, research, and teaching practice as they relate to poor and minority children (Bowels & Leven, 1968; Edmonds & Lezotte, 1974; Ravitch, 1981; Valencia, 1997; Baker, 2012). The Coleman Report was used to support the desegregation of schools and the creation of busing programs in which students were bused from poor, predominantly Black neighborhoods to attend affluent, mostly White schools (Jamenez-Castellanos, 2012). Later studies found that school busing programs and desegregation of schools were ineffective in closing the achievement gap and, in many cases, actually had a negative impact on student achievement among poor, minority students (Baker, 2012). Although the Coleman Report was instrumental in dismantling the social ill of racial segregation in American schools, some social scientists assert that conclusions drawn from the report form the basis for ideologies which frame students from historically marginalized backgrounds as inherently inferior to their white middle-class counterparts (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Baker, 2012). The Coleman Report concluded that the socioeconomic composition of schools was the most important factor influencing student achievement. The report recommended placing poor minority students into schools with a majority of White affluent students in order to increase academic achievement of the former. Among the conclusions drawn by researchers who performed the study was the presumption of "cultural deficiencies" within poor and minority communities that created barriers to

academic achievement. Furthermore, the researchers identified norms of white middle-class culture as the traits needed for students to excel academically (Coleman et al., 1966; Jamenez-Castellanos, 2012). Thus, the findings of the Coleman Report framed the achievement gap as a problem arising from “cultural deficiencies” rather than systematic inequities within the American education system that tend to disadvantage ethnic minorities and the poor (Edmonds, 1974; Borman & Dowling, 2010). The Coleman Report’s influence on subsequent achievement gap research is made evident by the fact that this later research focused on identifying means for addressing the presumed “cultural deficiencies” within historically marginalized groups (Jamenez-Castellanos, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2006). Within the realm of education policy, some researchers suggest the findings of the Coleman Report have been used to support the notion that inequities in school funding and other resources, such as high quality teachers and facilities, have little impact on closing the achievement gap (Baker, 2012; Borman & Dowling, 2010). Many researchers assert that the focus on “cultural deficiencies” removes the responsibility for closing the achieve gap from schools and government and places the blame for the existence of the achievement gap squarely on the shoulders of historically marginalized groups (Edmonds, 1974; Borman & Dowling, 2010; Howard, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Baker, 2012).

2.4 Deficit Ideology in Education

The view that issues such as the achievement gap stem from cultural deficiencies is the basis for deficit ideology. Deficit ideology posits that disparities in educational

achievement are directly linked to supposed deficiencies within marginalized population groups (Brandon, 2003; Valencia, 1997; Weiner, 2003; Yosso, 2005). A number of researchers assert that deficit ideology unduly effects perceptions of such students and by extension influences areas such as the policies pertaining to the education of poor and minority students and the manner in which they are treated in schools and classrooms (Berliner, 2006; Howard, 2013; Dudley-Marling & Lucas, 2009; Jones & Nichols, 2013; Ford & Moore, 2013).

Research suggests that within the current paradigm of American education, deficit ideology is used to frame policy and procedures that relate to students from historically marginalized backgrounds. Many schools are geared towards “fixing the issues” with students who come from “culturally deficient backgrounds” (i.e., racial/ethnic minority, poverty, etc.), rather than adjusting policy and pedagogy to better accommodate the educational needs of learners from diverse backgrounds (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Gorski, 2006; Howard, 2013). One corollary that is likely attributable to deficit ideology is that children who attend schools with a majority of poor minority students tend to spend more time engaged in remediation activities aimed at increasing performance on standardized tests rather than building the critical thinking skills that are necessary for academic success in advanced level course work. Teachers and administrators in such schools may also hold lower expectations for students and students may not be challenged to develop their academic capacity to level they are capable of (Jamenez-Castellanos, 2012; Toldson, Brown, & Sutton, 2009). Research also suggests that students from historically marginalized groups are more likely to be referred to special education (SPED) without a

diagnosis of a learning disability (NCES, 2013; Toldson, 2008). They also tend to receive disciplinary action more frequently and with greater intensity than affluent White students when committing the same disciplinary infractions (OCR, 2013; Howard, 2013).

Phenomena such as the over representation of minority students in special education (SPED) classrooms (Coffee & Onringer, 2004) and the under achievement of high-ability minority students are viewed by some scholars as evidence of the negative impact deficit ideology has within the education system on the academic achievement of poor ethnic minority students (Moore & Flowers, 2012; Ford & Moore, 2013).

2.4.1 Deficit Ideology and Stereotyping

By locating the root cause for educational issues such as the achievement gap within the culture of historically marginalized groups, deficit ideology discounts the impact systematic inequities, which grant some greater educational, political, and economic access than others, have on academic achievement across various socio-economic and ethnic groups (Brandon, 2003; Dudley-Marling, 2007; Gorski, 2008; Hamovitch, 1996). Deficit ideology also inherently devalues the culture, value systems, and communities some students identify with producing negative psychological impacts for those students, which may negatively influence academic achievement (Howard, Flenbaugh, & Terry, 2011; Ford & Moore, 2013). Deficit ideology may also contribute to phenomena such as “victim blaming” and the perpetuation of stereotypes about historically marginalized groups. People belonging to historically marginalized groups are often characterized in American media as conforming to a number of negative stereotypes (Moore & Flowers, 2012; Gorski, 2010; Howard, 2013; Howard, Flenbaugh, & Terry, 2011). Despite

evidence that counters many negative stereotypes about historically marginalized groups; such stereotypes are nevertheless promoted within education literature (Howard, 2013; Kunjufu, 2007; Howard, Flenbaugh, & Terry, 2011). For instance, Payne (2005) cited the above average frequency of substance abuse in the homes of children of poverty as a contributing factor of the achievement gap between children of poverty and more affluent students. Numerous studies show that substance abuse does not follow that pattern (Saxe et al., 2001; Hasin, 2008; NSDUH, 2012). Illicit drug use is distributed evenly across socioeconomic groups and the use of alcohol is most common among affluent Whites with a college education (NSDUH, 2012). Gorski (2013) identified five common stereotypes, present in education literature regarding families living in poverty that are not supported by the data:

1. Poor People Do Not Value Education – Gorski (2013) argues this notion is largely based on misinterpretation narrow measures of parental engagement, such as on-site involvement, which likely have more to do with social realities (i.e., work schedules, lack of transportation, etc.) than a disinterest in their children’s education. Gorski cited studies such as Cooper that found poor parents reported involving their children in home-learning activities at the same rate as non-poor parents. Gorski asserts that the perceived “devaluing” of education by the poor is more an issue of inequitable access to education.
2. Poor People Are Lazy – Gorski cites a study conducted by Waldron, Roberts, & Hayes (2004), which found that poor working adults on average work the equivalent of 1.2 full-time jobs. One in five jobs in the United States (2013) is below the poverty line (Reamer et al., 2008). Gorski argues those facts indicate resilience among the working poor, especially when taking into account that many of the jobs they work have limited opportunities for advancement, require intense manual labor, and do not offer benefits such as paid sick leave.
3. Poor People Are Substance Abusers – Gorski (2013) cites multiple studies such as Degenhardt et al., (2008), which found that alcohol use and the

- likelihood of alcohol abuse increased with income. Degenhardt et al., (2008) found that in the United States affluent Whites were the most likely to use alcohol and be alcoholics. The study also found that illicit drug use was flat across socioeconomic classes.
4. Poor People Are Linguistically Deficient and Poor Communicators – Gorski (2013) asserted that this is one of the most dangerous stereotypes in education because teachers make illogical assumptions regarding the aptitude of students based on speech patterns. Gorski cited Dudley-Marling (2009), which challenged the notion that children from low-income families are linguistically deprived. The notion that low-income children are linguistically deprived assumes the existence of “superior” and “inferior” language varieties, and idea that is widely discredited linguists (Miller, Cho, & Bracey, 2005). Whereas poor children are likely to begin kindergarten with less-developed reading skills than affluent children, Gorski points to studies that indicate the quality of early-childhood education students have access to is a greater determinant of literacy development than speech patterns. Poor children are less likely to have access to high quality early-childhood programs than affluent children (Temple, Reynolds, & Arteaga, 2010).
 5. Poor People Are Ineffective and Inattentive Parents – Gorski (2013) argued that this stereotype is derived from the aforementioned stereotypes. Gorski explains although poor children are more likely to engage in sedentary behaviors than more affluent children, this is attributable to the fact that poor students tend to have less access to extra-curricular activities. Gorski asserts that social realities, not a lack of care from parents (i.e., work schedules, lack of transportation, etc.) often prohibits poor children from engaging in extra-curricular activities.

Gorski (2013) contended that the stereotyping of poor children poses an inherent danger to their academic achievement. “Stereotypes can make us unnecessarily afraid or accusatory of our own students, including our *most disenfranchised* students, not to mention their families. They can misguide us into expressing low expectations for poor youth and their families or to blame them for the very ways in which the barriers they

face impede their abilities to engage with schools the way some of us might engage with schools” (Gorski, 2013).

2.5 Stereotyping and Cognitive Dissonance

Other research indicates that misguided stereotypes impact the treatment of poor and ethnic minority within the broader cultural context and the treatment of students who belong to those groups inside of schools (Howard, 2013; Jackson & Moore, 2006; Noguera & Yonemura Wing, 2006). Some researchers theorize that the perpetuation of stereotypes that defy reality stem from “cognitive dissonance” within the collective psyche of American society (Leary, 2001; Briggs, Briggs, & Leary, 2001). “Cognitive dissonance is the mental stress or discomfort experienced by an individual who holds two or more contradictory beliefs, ideas, or values at the same time, or is confronted by new information that conflicts with existing beliefs, ideas, or values” (Festinger, 1959). Some scholars posit that the existence of apparent injustices within American society creates a source of cognitive dissonance for many Americans (Anderson, 1989; Leary, 2005; Gans, 1995). Leary (2005) argued that in order to reconcile cognitive dissonance triggered by the reality of apparent injustices observed in American society, negative stereotypes have historically been perpetuated about the intelligence, moral character, and physical characteristics of those who have historically been the victims of injustice in America. Leary (2005) illustrated classic cognitive dissonance using an example from the writings of Thomas Jefferson, framer of the United States Constitution and slave owner. In his manuscript “Notes on the State of Virginia” Jefferson wrote:

“I advance it therefore as a suspicion only, that the Negroes, whether originally a distinct race, or made distinct by time and circumstances, are

inferior to the Whites in the endowments both of body and mind. ... This unfortunate difference of colour, and perhaps of faculty, is a powerful obstacle to the emancipation of these people.”

Leary (2005) asserted that the stereotypes perpetuated by individuals such as Jefferson are evidence of coping mechanisms used to assuage the mental stress and discomfort encountered as a result of cognitive dissonance. Some scholars argue that in the present day, unfounded stereotypes influence the practice of education and are used to rationalized policies that do not benefit historically marginalized groups (Berliner, 2006; Briggs, Briggs, & Leary, 2001; Jones & Nichols, 2013).

2.5.1 Stereotyping and Cognitive Dissonance in Education

Teacher training and professional development programs impact the practice of education by (Gorski, 2008). The training that teachers undergo before entering the field and as a part of their ongoing professional development influences how they interact with students (Jones & Nichols, 2013). Many of the curricula used to train teachers to work with diverse student population are steeped in deficit ideologies that perpetuate negative stereotypes about historically marginalized groups (Bomer, Dworin, May, & Semingson, 2008; Dudley-Marling & Lucas, 2009). One notable example is Ruby Payne’s, Framework for Understanding Poverty. The curriculum and teacher development materials adapted from it are used widely in both teacher education programs and schools around America (Kunjufu, 2007; Gorski, 2008). Ruby Payne’s, Framework for Understanding Poverty promotes theories regarding minorities and those living in poverty that are regarded as unsubstantiated by many education researchers because of a lack of

statistical data to support many of the claims made in Payne’s work (Bomer, Dworin, May, & Semingson, 2008; Gorski, 2009; Kunjufu, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Howard, 2013; Dudley-Marling & Lucas 2009). Payne’s framework is based upon the theory that a “culture of poverty” exists within historically marginalized groups (Payne, 2005). Within that framework, Payne places the “culture of poverty” below that of “middle class culture” and “wealthy culture” on the hierarchy that her framework establishes. The framework promotes views of each social class that do not include references to research or statistical data (Gorski, 2009). Payne’s framework for understanding poverty is outlined in following table:

Table 2.5.1: Payne’s “Hidden Rules Among Classes”

Hidden Rules Among Classes			
	POVERTY	MIDDLE CLASS	WEALTH
POSSESSIONS	People.	Things.	One-of -a-kind objects, legacies, pedigrees.
MONEY	To be used, spent.	To be managed.	To be conserved, invested.
PERSONALITY	Is for entertainment. Sense of humor is highly valued.	Is for acquisition and stability. Achievement is highly valued.	Is for connections. Financial, political, social connections are highly valued.
SOCIAL EMPHASIS	Social inclusion of people he/she likes.	Emphasis is on self-governance and self-sufficiency.	Emphasis is on social exclusion.
FOOD	Key question: Did you have enough? Quantity important.	Key question: Did you like it? Quality Important.	Key question: Was it presented well? Presentation important.
CLOTHING	Clothing valued for individual style and expression of personality.	Clothing valued for its quality and acceptance into norm of middle class. Label important.	Clothing valued for its artistic sense and expression. Designer important.
TIME	Present most important. Decisions made for moment based on feelings or survival.	Future most important. Decisions made against future ramifications;	Traditions and history, most important. Decisions made partially on basis of tradition and decorum.
EDUCATION	Valued and revered as abstract but not as reality.	Crucial for climbing success ladder and making money.	Necessary tradition for making and maintaining connections.
DESTINY	Believes in fate. Cannot do much to mitigate chance.	Believes in choice. Can change future with good choices now.	Noblesse oblige.
LANGUAGE	Casual register. Language is about survival.	Formal register. Language is about negotiation.	Formal register. Language is about networking.
FAMILY STRUCTURE	Tends to be matriarchal.	Tends to be patriarchal.	Depends on who has money.
WORLD VIEW	Sees world in terms of local setting	Sees world in terms of notional setting.	Sees world in terms of international view.
LOVE	Love and acceptance conditional based upon whether individual is liked.	Love and acceptance conditional and based largely upon achievement.	Love and acceptance conditional and related to social standing and connections.
DRIVING FORCES	Survival, relationships, entertainment.	Work, achievement.	Financial, political, social connections.
HUMOR	About people and sex.	About situations.	About social faux pas.

(Payne. 1996, pp.42-43)

The framework suggests that there are deficiencies (i.e., language deficiencies, disproportionately high rates of substance abuse, violence, etc.) within the “culture of poverty,” which create barriers to success for children living in poverty. For instance, Payne (2005) asserted that poor children are more likely to live with parents who are substance abusers; however, NCES (2013) data indicates that illicit drug use is flat across socioeconomic groups. NCES (2013) data also indicates that alcohol use is most prevalent among Whites with a college education. Furthermore, Payne’s framework suggests that in order for poor and or minority children to become operative learners they must, in effect, assimilate to the white middle class culture that permeates the school system (Payne, 2005; Kunjufu, 2007). An essay published by Payne in 2006 entitled “Reflections on Katrina and the Role of Poverty in the Gulf Coast Crisis” used Payne’s poverty framework to explain the tragedies that took place in New Orleans following Hurricane Katrina. “The violence was to be expected. Words are not seen as being very effective in generational poverty to resolve differences; fists are.... Furthermore, to resolve a conflict, one must have the ability to go from the personal to the issue, and the words largely are not there to do that.” The explanation that Payne (2006) presents for the tragedy witnessed after Hurricane Katrina appears to downplays the role of government inaction and systemic inequities during the disaster and locates the problem within “generational poverty.” Some scholars contend that one implication of locating the problem within historically marginalized groups rather than addressing inequity within the system is that policy makers enact policies that focus on “fixing” people and communities rather than addressing the conditions that exacerbate the problems they are

faced with (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Briggs, Briggs, & Leary, 2001; Dudley-Marling & Lucas 2009). In the context of education policy, efforts to close the achievement gap may be framed around “fixing” students’ deficiencies rather than ensuring that the system is equitable for all students (Jones & Nichols, 2013; Moore & Lewis, 2014; Toldson, 2008).

2.6 Achievement Gap or Opportunity Gap?

There is a wide body of education research that refutes the notion that the persistence of the achievement gap is a direct result of cultural deficiencies found within historically marginalized groups (Bomer et al., 2008; Darling-Hammond, 2004; Ford & Grantham, 2003; Howard, 2013; Jackson & Moore, 2006; Toldson, 2014; Ladson-Billings, 2006). Ladson-Billings (2006) proposed that the achievement gap is a symptom of systematic issues within American society that have created an “Education Debt.” That article included a definition for the Education Debt proposed by Robert Haveman, professor emeritus at the University of Wisconsin’s Department of Economics, La Follette Institute of Public Affairs, and Institute for Research on Poverty.

“The education debt is the foregone schooling resources that we could have (should have) been investing in (primarily) low income kids, which deficit leads to a variety of social problems (e.g., crime, low productivity, low wages, low labor force participation) that require on-going public investment. This required investment sucks away resources that could go to reducing the achievement gap. Without the education debt we could narrow the achievement debt. . . . The message would be that you need to reduce one (the education debt, defined above) in order to close the other (the achievement gap).”

In short, according to Haveman, the education debt is the accumulation of opportunity deficits that have persisted throughout the history of America for

historically marginalized groups (Ladson-Billing, 2006; Anderson, 1989).

According to Ladson-Billings, attempting to address the achievement gap without first addressing the root causes for its existence is an ineffective means of approaching the issue. Ladson-Billing (2006) identifies four components of the education debt:

1. Historical Debt – arising from historic inequities formed around race, class, and gender
2. Economic Debt – arising from funding disparities between schools that serve affluent White students and those that serve students from other racial or economic groups
3. Sociopolitical Debt – arising from the exclusion of marginalized groups from the political process
4. Moral Debt – arising from unfounded perceptions of the threat posed by individuals or groups of individuals within the populace, namely racial minorities and the poor

2.6.1 Historical Debt

According to Ladson-Billings (2006), taking into context the enormity of the education debt, achievement gaps are to be expected. As President Lyndon B. Johnson stated in an address to Howard University in 1964, “You cannot take a man who has been in chains for 300 years remove the chains, take him to the starting line and tell him to run the race, and think that you are being fair” (Ladson-Billings, 2006). “Ethnic minorities and the poor have historically had inequitable access high quality education in America (Anderson, 1989; Gorski, 2008). Since colonial times, poor and minority children have either lacked access to education, or they have been largely relegated to schools that have fewer resources and less support than schools that serve affluent White children (Anderson, 1989; Valencia, 2005; Darling-Hammond & Post, 2000). In the case of Black

and Hispanic Americans, universal education did not become a reality until the late 1960's, several years after court decisions in *Mendez v. Westminster District of Orange County* in 1947 and the *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* in 1954. Both cases challenged the legality of segregation on the basis of race (Anderson, 1989; Valencia, 2005). In some public school districts, integration did not take place until the 1970s (Jones & Jenkins, 2012; Valencia, 2005). Even with the desegregation of public schools, "white flight" to suburban neighborhoods and private schools instituted de facto segregation for many school districts in the Southeast and Southwest United States. This is pattern presently persists in many urban and rural school districts located in those regions of the country (NCES, 2013; OCR, 2013).

In addition to de facto segregation, there is also a lack of diversity in America's teaching force. 48.3% of children attending public schools in the United States identify as ethnic minorities; whereas, 5.1% of teachers in public school are ethnic minorities (NCES, 2013; OCR, 2013). Some scholars attribute the dearth of minority educators in America's schools in part to the disenfranchisement of minority educators in the years immediately following desegregation. During this, period large numbers of minority educators lost their positions, fueling mistrust and resentment between the public school system and minority communities. The decline in minority educators immediately following desegregation has not been significantly counteracted in the years since, and remains particularly acute among minority male educators (Jones & Jenkins, 2012; Hilliard, 1997; Fairclough, 2004). Some researchers posit that a lack of diversity within the teaching force diminishes the sense of belonging within schools for minority children

and provides schools with limited perspectives when dealing with students from diverse backgrounds. This may result in school implementing policies that have disproportionately negative impact on children of color (Toldson, 2008; Delpit, 2006).

2.6.2 The Economic Debt

Given the enormity of the historical debt, Ladson-Billings (2006) asserted that the economic debt accrued from centuries of inequity in the educational opportunities afforded to historically marginalized groups is insurmountable. In addition, at various stages in America's history, societal ills such as slavery and systemic prejudice on the basis of race and social class not only limited opportunity for some populations, but exploited the benefits of that population's labor to create additional advantages for affluent Whites (Hilliard, 1990; Anderson, 1989; Ladson-Billings, 2006). Ladson-Billings (2006) also pointed out that in addition to the existing economic debt, there are continuing deficits in the level of support granted to affluent White children versus that granted to children from historically marginalized backgrounds. Ladson-Billings (2006) posited that these continued deficits contribute to the persistence of the achievement gap observed between affluent White children and children from historically marginalized backgrounds. Indeed, schools that serve children from historically marginalized backgrounds tend to lag significantly behind schools that serve affluent White children in terms of funding levels, quality of facilities, course offerings, and percentage of highly qualified teachers (NCES, 2013; OCR, 2013; Marks et al., 2014). Such findings belie the commonly held wisdom of education policy makers, based on the finding of the Coleman

Report, that funding does not significantly impact the academic achievement of poor and minority students (Jones & Nichols, 2013). Rather, research shows that carefully targeted funding and social service support can have significant impacts on the achievement of poor and minority students (Dobbie & Fryer, 2011; Marks et al., 2014). See section 2.8 for further discussion.

2.6.3 The Sociopolitical Debt

The sociopolitical debt is indicative of the ways in which historically marginalized communities are excluded from the political process (Ladson-Billings, 2006). In his 1979 article, “Effective Schools for the Urban Poor” Ronald Edmonds asserts that change in education is largely dependent on there being enough political will to effect change. “What I am therefore suggesting is that if you genuinely seek the means to education equity for all our people, you must encourage parent’s attention to politics as the greatest instrument to instructional reform extant” (Edmonds, 1979). Ladson-Billings (2006) pointed out that major reforms to America’s education system, such as desegregation of schools, came on the heels of proactive political movements aimed at addressing that issue. The momentum needed to effect structural changes that will promote equity in educational opportunity, according to Ladson-Billings (2006), can be implemented most effectively through the civic system. Furthermore, Ladson-Billings (2006) argued, unequal access to legislative resources limits the amount of political capital available to historically marginalized groups to effect change.

2.6.4 The Moral Debt

Ladson-Billings (2006) asserted, "...A moral debt reflects the disparity between what we know is right and what we actually do." There exists a wide body of evidenced-based research that indicate what types of interventions are most effective in helping children from historically marginalized backgrounds succeed in schools (Marks et al., 2014). Despite this body of knowledge, studies show that schools serving students from historically marginalized backgrounds by and large tend to implement strategies that are inconsistent with promoting academic success with this population (Toldson, 2008). Many scholars have asserted that the problems does not lie in a lack of knowledge of what to do to help students from historically marginalized backgrounds succeed, but rather in the gap that exists between knowing and doing as it applies to education policy and the implementation of effective practices in schools (Comer et al., 1973; Ravitch, 2013; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Darling-Hammond, 2010).

Multiple studies indicate that schools serving students of color and the poor tend to have fewer experienced teachers, more uncertified teachers, provide a narrower curriculum, have fewer material resources, and have lower quality facilities than schools that serve affluent White students. These factors negatively influence students' academic achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2010, 99-120; Marks et al., 2014). Ladson-Billings (2006) argued that properly addressing the moral debt necessitates that America's moral failings first be openly and widely acknowledged and that good faith efforts be made to redress inequities through education policy.

2.7 Examining Opportunity Gaps in Town/Rural Schools

2.7.1 Composition of School Districts in the United States

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) designates four categories for public schools (City, Suburb, Town, and Rural) in the United States based on geographic location and population density. Of the 86 public school districts in South Carolina, 69 are categorized as either Town or Rural districts. Only 8 school districts in South Carolina are categorized as City districts. None are categorized as Large City districts. Table 2.7.1 details those four categories of schools, the subcategories that fit into each category, and the number of each type of school district in South Carolina.

Table 2.7.1: Composition of United States School Districts

Locale	Definition
City (8)	
Large (0)	Territory inside an urbanized area and inside a principal city with population of 250,000 or more
Midsize (2)	Territory inside an urbanized area and inside a principal city with population less than 250,000 and greater than or equal to 100,000
Small (6)	Territory inside an urbanized area and inside a principal city with population less than 100,000
Suburb (9)	
Large (5)	Territory outside a principal city and inside an urbanized area with population of 250,000 or more
Midsize (2)	Territory outside a principal city and inside an urbanized area with population less than 250,000 and greater than or equal to 100,000
Small (2)	Territory outside a principal city and inside an urbanized area with population less than 100,000
Town (20)	
Fringe (2)	Territory inside an urban cluster that is less than or equal to 10 miles from an urbanized area

Distant (13)	Territory inside an urban cluster that is more than 10 miles and less than or equal to 35 miles from an urbanized area
Remote (5)	Territory inside an urban cluster that is more than 35 miles from an urbanized area
<i>Rural (49)</i>	
Fringe (28)	Census-defined rural territory that is less than or equal to 5 miles from an urbanized area, as well as rural territory that is less than or equal to 2.5 miles from an urban cluster
Distant (20)	Census-defined rural territory that is more than 5 miles but less than or equal to 25 miles from an urbanized area, as well as rural territory that is more than 2.5 miles but less than or equal to 10 miles from an urban cluster
Remote (1)	Census-defined rural territory that is more than 25 miles from an urbanized area and is also more than 10 miles from an urban cluster

(NCES, 2011; Office of Management and Budget, 2000)

2.7.2 Distribution of Minority Students by School Type

NCES (2013) data show that 42.7% of minority K-12 students attending K-12 public schools live in urban areas. Of the approximately 14.5 K-12 students attending urban public schools, 70.3% identify as students of color. Table 2.7.2 details demographic data taken from NCES (2013) as it relates to the minority students attending K-12 public schools in the United States.

Table 2.7.2: Distribution of Minority Students by School Type

	Minority Population	% of US K-12 Minority Population	% Minority in Setting	PI > 50%
Urban	10,157,645	42.7%	70.3%	62.0%
Suburb	7,944,079	33.4%	47.5%	34.0%
Town	1,956,958	8.2%	34.5%	53.8%
Rural	3,723,693	15.7%	30.0%	41.1%
Total/U.S.	23,782,375	100%	48.3%	

(NCES, 2013)

Column 1 shows the total population of Minority students attending schools in each setting: (Urban, 10,157,645; Suburban, 7,944,049; Town, 1,956, 958; Rural, 3,723,693). Column 2 shows the percentage of minority students attending K-12 public schools in each setting: (Urban, 42.7%; Suburban, 33.4%; Town, 8.2%; Rural, 15.7%). Column 3 shows the percentage of minority students in each setting: (Urban, 70.3%; Suburban, 47.5%; Town, 34.5%; Rural, 30%). Column 4 shows the percentage of students that attend a school with a poverty index above 50% in each setting: (Urban, 62.0%; Suburban, 34.0%; Town, 53.8%; Rural, 41.1%). The poverty index for each school is determined by the percentage of students who qualify for free or reduced lunch. Eligibility for free or reduced lunch is determined by household income as compared to the household size (NCES, 2013). As illustrated in table 1.1.2, the majority of minority students attending K-12 public schools do not attend urban schools. According to NCES (2013) data, sub-urban schools account for the next largest percentage of K-12 minority students with 33.4%. The data also show that 23.9% of K-12 minority students attend town/rural schools. Although this a significant portion of the population, there exists a dearth of research related to minority students attending town/rural schools (SEF, 2013).

2.7.3 Examining Opportunity Gaps in South Carolina's Schools

In 1993, almost 40 years after the Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka case, commonly referred to as Brown v. Board of Education, was decided by the United States Supreme Court, eight school districts representing 36 plaintiff districts filed suit against

the state of South Carolina. The plaintiffs in the case alleged that South Carolina failed to provide for adequate educational opportunities for the children attending schools in those districts. State standardized testing data from the time indicated that those schools comprised the lowest performing schools in the state (Ferillo & Associates, 2006). Furthermore, the plaintiffs alleged that the state funding model had a disproportionately negative impact on funding for low-income rural schools with high proportions of minority students (Fogle, 2007). The plaintiff districts, at the time the lawsuit was filed, were on average 88.4% minority with 86% of children living below the poverty line (Ferillo & Associates, 2006). Some of the plaintiff school districts involved in that case were involved in the original Briggs v. Elliott and Brown v. Board of Education cases that took place during the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s (Weiler, 2007). After 12 years of litigation, in 2005, a judge ruled that in the area of early childhood education the state had failed to meet its responsibility of providing all students with a “minimally adequate education”; however, the judge held that the state had met this requirement for K-12 education. Both parties in the case filed a motion to reconsider the case, both of which were dismissed by the judge. Following that decision, the plaintiff school districts appealed to the South Carolina Supreme Court (Fogle, 2007). The South Carolina Supreme Court heard final arguments for this case in June of 2008. To date, a ruling is still pending for this case (SCDOE, 2014).

South Carolina Department of Education (2013) data indicate that poverty levels for town/rural areas of the state remain high, particularly, in the lower part of the state. The K-12 population demographics in these schools do not align with the demographic

data for the counties where the schools are located. The demographic data in those counties indicate that the proportion of affluent White children enrolled in public schools should be higher supposing trends adhered to national norms (Lichter, 2013; SCDOE, 2013). In those counties however, the majority of affluent White students attend private schools where the proportion of minority students is likely to be less than 10% (NCEST, 2013). Besides creating ethnically segregated schools, this trend has the added side effect of dividing students by socio-economic status, which aligns closely with ethnicity (NCES, 2013). School located with this region of South Carolina are also likely to receive less funding from local sources such as corporate taxes, sales taxes, and property taxes (REFC, 2012). Furthermore, policy in South Carolina favors school choice, this has led to expansion in the number of students attending charter schools, many which are for-profit organizations, in the past 10 years (SCDOE, 2013). South Carolina also grants a tax deduction of \$1.42 for every dollar individuals donate to qualifying private school scholarship funds up to \$10,000 (SCEOC, 2014). Those factors are likely tied to declining enrollment and decreased revenue at many low-income rural public schools (Buddin & Zimmer, 2005; REFC, 2012).

2.7.4 National Trends Related to Low-income Town/Rural Schools.

The trend of academic underachievement occurring in South Carolina's low-income rural/town schools is not unique to that the state, the same trends are apparent in other states. Data from the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center (NSCRC) show that students attending rural public schools tend to have the lowest college

enrollment rates for poor and minority students in the semester after high school graduation than any other public school demographic. Research indicates that this trend can in large part be attributed to the availability of fewer educational opportunities for minority children who attend low-income rural schools (NSCRC, 2013). Further examination of NCES (2013) data show that many low-income, town/rural schools in the southeastern and southwestern United States have significantly higher proportions of minority students than town/rural schools in the northeastern and mid-western United States (Lichter, 2013).

Low-income, high minority, rural schools tend to have more narrow curriculums when compared to other schools. Upon graduation, fewer students attending such schools have taken advanced level coursework than students who attend public schools from any other demographic (Toldson et al., 2008). Low-income, high minority, rural schools are also more likely to: employ teachers with fewer years of experience; have more teachers who are not certified in the subject area they teach; receive less material support; and have older facilities than other schools (SEF, 2013; Toldson et al., 2008; REFC, 2014). Children entering kindergarten at low-income, high minority schools tend to have less access to high quality pre-school programs and are also less likely to be prepared to enter kindergarten. Those students tend to start school significantly behind their peers at other schools and are likely to fall further behind their peers academically during the course of K-12 schooling (SEF, 2013).

Citing academic under-achievement in public schools, many education policy makers have promoted the proliferation of school choice policies and inter-school

competition as a means of improving the overall quality of the education system (Ravitch, 2013, pp 156-158). School choice policy typically endorses the formation of charter schools and vouchers for students to attend private schools. Critics of education policies that promote school choice argue that such policies drain funding from public schools and help to create school populations that are increasingly segregated on the basis of ethnicity and socio-economic status (Lichter, 2013; Ravitch, 2013, pp 165-180). Studies show that low-income and minority students who use vouchers to attend private schools or switch their enrollment to charter schools are typically outperformed by their peers in traditional public schools in terms of academic performance (Ravitch, 2013, pp 156-180; EPRU & EPIC, 2007). Research regarding public charter schools and private school voucher programs nationally show wide variation in student performance as measured by academic achievement on standardized tests. These data support the arguments of some scholars that school choice education policies do little to promote the overall improvement of America's education system (Ravitch, 2013, pp 150-155; Goldsmith, 2010). A number of researchers posit that ensuring schools employ key research-based strategies to improve student learning and that they have the necessary material support has a greater impact on improving students' academic achievement than interschool competition (Darling-Hammond, 2010, pp 27-62, pp 99-120; Comer & Emmons, 2006; Jones & Nichols, 2013).

2.8 Models for Creating Academic Success in High Poverty High Minority Schools

Some theorists and education policy makers have attributed the existence of the achievement gap to cultural deficiencies associated with minority students and those living in poverty (Coleman et al., 1966; Payne, 2005; Dudley-Marling & Lucas, 2009). However, several studies have demonstrated that by employing the right mix of educational strategies, schools can realize high levels of academic achievement regardless of the racial or socioeconomic make-up of the school (Comer & Emmons, 2006; Reeves, 2000; Howard, 2013; Dobbie & Fryer, 2011; Edmonds, 1979). In the seminal article, “Effective Schools for the Poor,” Edmonds (1979) outlined “the most tangible and indispensable characteristics of effective schools”:

1. They have strong administrative leadership without which the disparate element of good schooling can neither be brought together nor kept together.
2. Schools that are instructionally effective for poor children have a climate of expectation in which no children are permitted to fall below minimum but efficacious levels of achievement.
3. The school’s atmosphere is orderly without being rigid, quiet without being oppressive, and generally conducive to the instructional business at hand.
4. Effective schools get that way partly by making it clear that pupil acquisition of basic skills takes precedence over all other school activities.
5. When necessary, school energy can be diverted from other business in furtherance of the fundamental objectives.
6. There must be some means by which pupil progress can be frequently monitored.

Subsequent studies have outlined similar characteristics of effective schools for poor and minority students (Comer & Emmons, 2006; Reeves, 2000, pp. 185-208; Howard, 2013; Dobbie & Fryer, 2011). Reeves (2000) studied the characteristics of 90/90/90 schools,

these are schools with over 90% poverty, 90% ethnic minorities, and 90% of students achieving at high proficiency levels on independently administered assessments of academic achievement. Reeves (2000) identified five common characteristics of 90/90/90 schools

1. Focus on academic achievement – data related to student achievement were displayed within the school with a continuous emphasis on continuous improvement
2. Provide clear curriculum choices – more time was spent in the core areas of reading, writing, and math than other subjects
3. Frequently assess student progress and allow multiple opportunities for improvement – weekly teacher constructed assessments were administered with multiple opportunities to improved performance.
4. Written responses on performance assessments – written responses were required, this appeared to allow teachers to better assess students' learning needs
5. They allow for student work to be scored collaboratively – student assignments were scored using a scoring guide with student papers being exchanged and scored by other teachers and by principals to insure inter-rater reliability.

The results of the 90/90/90 schools study suggests that the academic achievement in schools are largely based on the strategies and practices employed by teachers and leaders, not the ethnic backgrounds or socio-economic status of the students (Reeves, 2000, pp. 207-208).

The Harlem Children's Zone (HCZ) is another example of higher than expected academic achievement levels in schools that serve predominantly poor minority children. HCZ encompasses a 97-block area in Harlem, New York. The first Promise Academy charter schools were started in 2004. HCZ combines community programs with charter schools to support the developmental and academic needs of children from birth through college graduation (Fryer & Dobbie, 2011). Fryer & Dobbie (2011) found that HCZ had

greater than expected academic achievement levels based on the make-up of their student populations. The researchers also found similar levels of academic achievement when comparing students who lived inside the HCZ and lottery entrants, who lived outside the HCZ, "...that suggests our results are driven by the school inputs at the Promise Academy and not the community programs provided by HCZ" (Fryer & Dobbie, 2011). The researchers attributed the higher than expected levels of academic achievement to a number of three key factors operating inside of the HCZ Schools:

1. Staffing of schools with high-quality teachers- the researchers demonstrated that the results were similar to the variance in teacher quality for other studies
2. A linear combination of good policy decisions – the research demonstrated that levels of academic achievement in the study aligned with result that were predicted by plugging the HCZ school's combination of policies into Hoxby and Murarka's (2009) estimates.
3. The use of data to inform and differentiate instruction – this method has demonstrated very large effects (0.28 to .47 standard deviations).

The Comer School Development Program (CSDP) is perhaps one of the most well documented researched programs has produced significant gains in academic achievement for poor minority students across a range of school settings. CSDP was developed based on the findings from a number of studies conducted by Dr. James P. Comer, professor of Child Psychology at the Yale School of Medicine. Dr. Comer identified six developmental pathways for children. In his research, Dr. Comer, argues that those developmental pathways are essential to the proper development of children and that by employing strategies that target those developmental pathways schools can enhance academic achievement for students from all backgrounds (Comer et al., 1973;

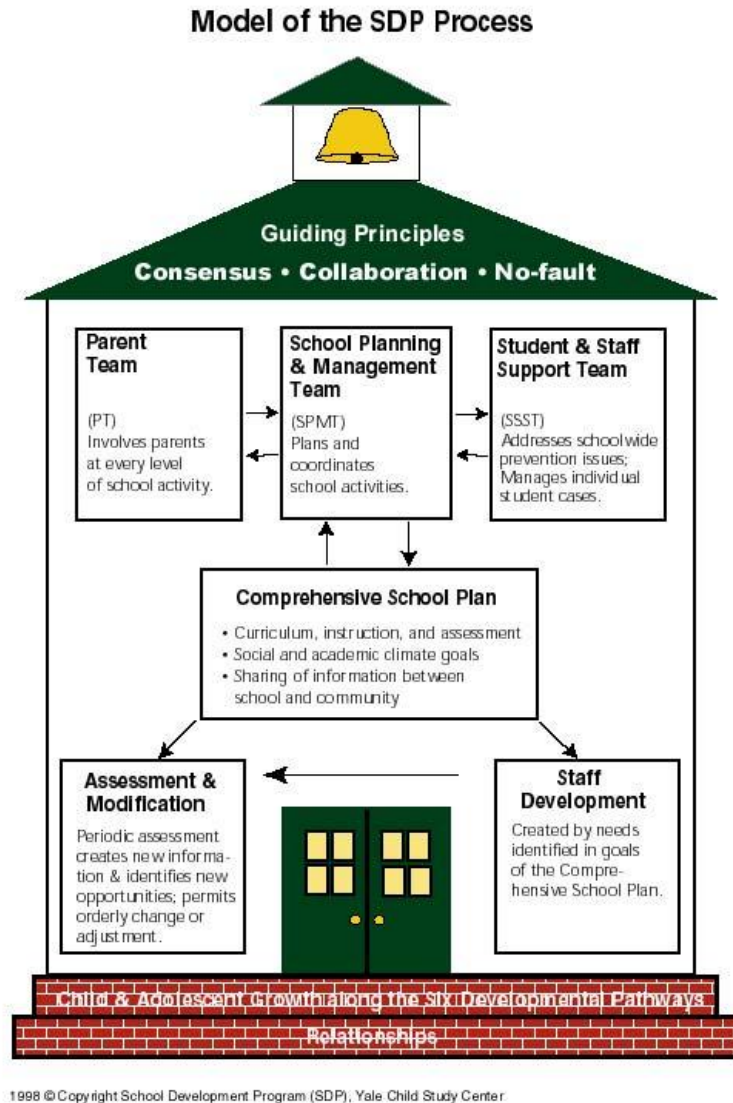
Comer, 1980; Comer, 1992; Comer & Haynes, 1996; Comer & Emmons, 2006). Comer's developmental pathways include:

1. The Social Pathway – involves the ability of young people to develop healthy relationships and is enhanced by group work and team activities.
2. The Ethical (and Moral) Pathway – involves making ethical and moral decisions based on defined ethical and moral principles.
3. The Physical Pathway – involves physiological development including brain development (which continues until the mid-20s), sensory development and coordination.
4. The Cognitive Pathway – involves thinking, problem solving, analysis, application and synthesis of information / ideas.
5. The Language Pathway – involves the capacity for expression and reception of language in writing, speech and otherwise.
6. The Psychological Pathway – involves emotional health, self-esteem, identity formation, confidence and self-control / self-regulation.

Using the six developmental pathways as guide, Dr. Comer developed CSDP. CSDP is a comprehensive plan for creating structure within a school to support the developmental needs of children and improve academic achievement levels. The model also works from the premise that "No significant learning occurs without a significant relationship"(Comer, 2014). Studies show that implementation of the CSDP has resulted in academic achievement gains in a variety of school settings where the population is comprised of mostly poor ethnic minority students (Comer & Emmons, 2006; CSDP, 2014). The CSDP is currently used by a number of schools in both urban and rural setting where data indicate significant improvements in academic achievement (CSDP, 2014).

Figure 2.8.1 is a model of the CSDP Process:

Figure 2.8.1: Model of Comer School Development Process



Evidence from the literature appears to support the three declarative statements presented in Edmonds (1979):

1. We can, whenever and wherever we choose, successfully teach all children whose schooling is of interest to us;
2. We already know more than we need to do that;

3. Whether or we do it must finally depend on how we feel about the fact that we haven't so far.

Chapter III

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

Research related to schools with elevated proportions of students of color and students from poverty largely focuses on urban areas. This study was undertaken to address the dearth of research literature related to town/rural schools with such populations (REFC, 2014; Toldson et al., 2006; Williams, 2003). About one in four ethnic minorities attending K-12 public schools attends a town/rural school. Those data also show that a significant portion of rural/town K-12 public schools, particularly in the southeastern and southwestern United States have majority ethnic minority student populations and poverty rates that exceed 90% (NCES, 2013).

Several studies have demonstrated that, by employing the appropriate blend of policies and educational strategies, schools can realize increased levels of academic achievement regardless of the racial and socioeconomic composition of the school (Comer & Emmons, 2006; Dobbie & Fryer, 2011; Edmonds, 1979; Howard, 2013; Reeves, 2000). Gaining greater knowledge of the unique dynamics that may effect academic achievement in poor town/rural schools, especially with predominately students of color, may play a significant role in determining methods for eliminating the achievement gap between racial/ethnic groups (Coffee & Obringer, 2004; REFC, 2013; Toldson et al., 2006).

3.2 Purpose of Study

After an analysis of the school quality ratings data as reported by the South Carolina State Department of Education (SCDOE, 2013), the researcher found that a dearth of academically high-achieving schools that serve primarily students of color and those living below the poverty line. Because extant research supports early academic intervention as an effective means of closing achievement gaps, the researcher decided to conduct this study with elementary schools (Dobbie & Fryer, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Ravitch, 2013). Of the 656 schools that the state reported data on, 210 of those schools reported that at least 90% of their population lived below the poverty line (SCDOE, 2013). Out of those 210 schools, only four received the state's highest rating "Excellent" for their overall performance on the state standardized exam (e.g., Palmetto Assessment of State Standards; PASS). There were two additional schools that received an "Excellent" rating for their "Growth" or ability to improve students' achievement on the PASS exam. Furthermore, analysis of these data indicated that students attending high-poverty public schools (90% or higher) have less than a 3% chance of attending a school that received the state's highest rating for one of the two categories that are measured by the SCDOE (SCDOE, 2013). The aforementioned findings from SCDOE data on public elementary schools prompted the researcher to undertake this study. Considering the small sample size of academically high-achieving schools with poverty rates $\geq 90\%$, the researcher decided that an in-depth analysis of those schools, in comparison to those low-achieving schools with similar demographics, would be worthwhile endeavor. More specifically, the study would allow the researcher to gain

important insights on those factors that may have influenced the high-achievement levels of those high-poverty schools that received high ratings from the state.

Using a multi-case study approach, the researcher obtained detailed and in-depth data about four rural/ town elementary schools in South Carolina. All of the schools possessed similar demographic compositions; however, several of the schools achieved significantly higher academic achievement outcomes than the others. Therefore, the researcher collected data from those schools, who met the study's criteria, to obtain important insights on factors, such as school climate and faculty, staff, and administration members' perceptions of their schools' strengths and weakness related to supporting the academic achievement of students at their schools. For this study, the researcher conducted a comparative analysis of the selected schools to understand what similarities and differences existed, and the researcher used the findings to draw important conclusions about reasons for the differences in academic achievement exhibited among the participating schools.

3.3 Research Questions

Using a multi-case study approach, the below research questions were explored:

4. What challenges to students' academic performance were identified by the staff?
5. How did study participants characterize their schools' strengths and areas for improvement and/or change?
6. How do the results compare for the schools that participated in this study?

3.4 Study Limitations & Delimitations

Due to the small sample size of schools that participated in this study, the results are not generalizable to all schools in South Carolina with similar demographic compositions. Rather than generalizable findings, this study provided a detailed description and analysis of the school climate, (e.g., *Strengths*, and *Areas for Improvement* as perceived by the faculty, staff, and administration at each of the participating schools). Further, the study offered initial data that could be used in future studies.

3.5 Comer School Development Model as a Framework

The Comer School Development Model was used as a framework for interpreting the results of this study. As discussed in Chapter II, the research literature supports the notion that schools with high rates of poverty exhibit higher levels of academic achievement when there is a high degree of support and proficiency corresponding to the nine variables assessed by the *Comer School Climate Survey* (Comer & Emmons, 2006; CSDP, 2014). The findings of this study are presented using the Comer School Development Model as a context for interpreting the data and assessing staff perceptions of school climate, *Strengths*, and *Areas for Improvement*.

3.6 Research Design

Employing a multi-case study approach, this study collected both quantitative and qualitative data to address the aforementioned research questions (Creswell, 2012). The

multi-case study approach allowed the researcher to “obtain a detailed description and gain an understanding of the case” (McMillan, 2008, p. 288). Because the study’s research questions were intended to investigate “characteristics of an entity, phenomenon, or person” (Gay & Airasian, 2000, p. 239), the multi-case study approach was found to be advantageous. More specifically, the study involved four elementary schools and varied participants from these schools. According to McMillian (2008), a multi-case study approach examines various characteristics and gleans important insights within and between cases (Mertens, 2010). Possible replications with multiple cases increase confidence with this approach (Yin, 2004). A drawback to multi-case studies is a reduction in depth, when compared to single case study; however, the reduction in depth is a tradeoff for increasing the breadth of the study (Yin, 2008).

Stake (2005) asserts that cases exist in a “bounded system.” For instance there are limits on factors such as the length of time a study may be conducted or the number of individuals who are able to participate in interviews (Creswell, 2009, p.13). This “bounded system” also places restraints on the design of the research study (Creswell, p. 13). For this study, the design was restricted by university guidelines related to the researcher’s doctoral program and Institutional Review Board (IRB) policies. Gatekeeper permissions within in the various school districts the participating schools belonged to also placed restrictions on the design of this study.

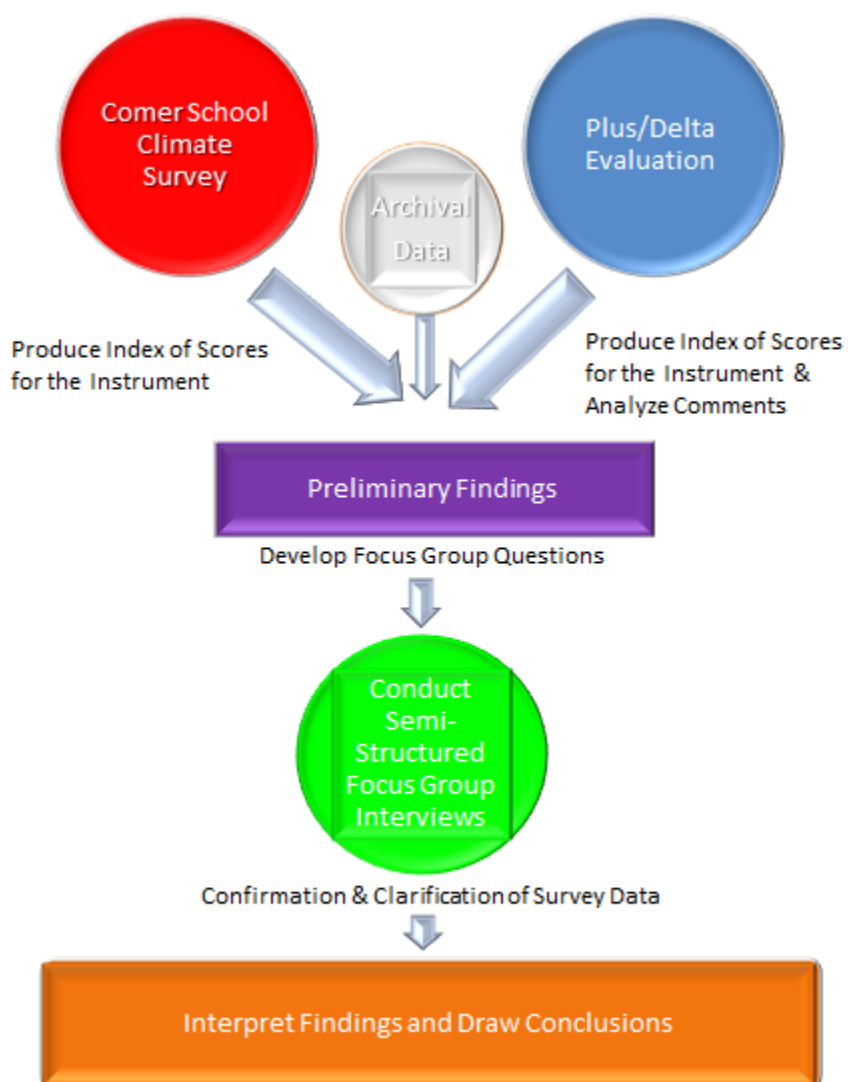
This multi-case study incorporates elements of a mixed-methods research design. Generally speaking, researchers use mixed-methods when qualitative or quantitative research alone may not adequately address the research questions. By combining

quantitative and qualitative data collection procedures, a more comprehensive explanation of the research questions is more conceivable (Creswell, 2012), which is why researcher's opted to incorporate mixed-methods into the design.

The convergent parallel design was used as a model for this multi-case study. In the convergent parallel design, the researcher used multiple data sources concurrently to answer his the aforementioned research questions. The survey instruments (e.g., *Comer School Climate Survey and Plus/Delta Analysis*) were used to create an index of scores. The index of scores for both instruments were compared and contrasted to identify trends (Creswell, 2012). In this multi-case study, the initial findings that emerged from analysis of the data from were used to inform the interview protocol for the focus groups. More specifically, the focus group interviews were incorporated into the research design to allow for confirmation and clarification of the survey findings. The focus groups also allowed the researcher to triangulate data collected from surveys and other data sources. (Wholey, Hatry, & Newcomer, 2010).

In-depth descriptions of all of the survey instruments and the focus group protocol used are included in the sections 3.6 and 3.7 of this chapter. The process outlined in figure 3.6.1 was replicated within each of the participating schools:

Figure 3.6.1: Model of Research Design



3.7 Survey Instruments

Two survey instruments were used to assess school characteristics, the *Comer School Climate Survey* and the *Plus/Delta School Evaluation* instrument. Efforts were made to make the *Comer School Climate Survey* and the *Plus/Delta School Evaluation*

instrument accessible to the entire staff at all of the participating schools. The purpose of making both instruments accessible to the entire staff was to approximate the staffs' perceptions of school climate, *Strengths*, and *Areas for Improvement* as closely as possible. Following the preliminary analysis of the data collected with both instruments, smaller sample populations were selected to participate in semi-structured focus group interviews. The purpose of the focus group interviews was to provide feedback on the initial findings that emerged from the finding of the *Comer School Climate Survey* and the *Plus/Delta School Evaluation instrument*. That feedback was solicited primarily for the purpose of confirming and clarifying the initial findings.

3.7.1 *Comer School Climate Survey*

The *Comer School Climate Survey* was used to collect closed-ended data for this study. This instrument measures included nine variables associate with school climate. The *Comer School Climate Survey* was chosen as the instrument to collect closed ended data because the reliability and validity of the instrument is well documented in the research literature (Comer & Emmons, 2006; Delpit. 2012; Yosso, 2005). This instrument was originally designed by the Yale Child Study Center as the pre-implementation and progress assessment for schools using the *Comer Process* (Haynes & Comer, 1993). The *Comer Process* includes a framework that uses nine variables to assess school climate and assist schools in making decisions that benefit students (CSDP, 2012). The nine variables measured by the *Comer School Climate Survey* include: *Achievement Motivation, Collaborative Decision-Making, Equity and Fairness,*

Leadership, Order and Discipline, School Building, School/Parent/Community Relations, Staff Dedication to Student Learning, and Staff Expectations (CSDP, 2012). For the purposes of this study, the survey was used only as a measure of school climate and not an assessment of implementation of the Comer Process. None of the participating schools had implemented the Comer Process at the time of this study.

The researcher decided to use revised staff version of the *Comer School Climate Survey* because it is the most up to date version of the instrument. Additionally, the scope of this study only encompassed the perceptions of staff members, thus the staff version of survey was a logical choice for the sample population engaged that participated in this study. Participants responded to fifty-four survey items, rating them on a five-point Likert scale. To protect anonymity, the instrument did not collect any personally identifiable data. Respondents were instructed to answer the questions based on how well they thought the statement described their school. Response options included: 1- strongly disagree, 2- disagree, 3 – neutral, 4 – agree, 5 – strongly agree. Additionally, responses were coded with point values that correspond to each rating on the Likert scale (e.g., strongly agree = 5, agree = 4, neutral = 3, disagree = 2, strongly disagree = 1). The scores recorded for each participant were averaged with the scores of other participants from the same school. Those averages generated the overall mean (μ) for each variable. The researcher initially identified *Strengths* and *Areas for Improvement* as perceived by the staff at each of the participating schools based on the μ for each of the variables measured by the *Comer School Climate Survey*.

Table 3.7.1 contains a list of the variables measured by the *Comer School*

Climate Survey along with a definition for each variable.

Table 3.7.1: *Comer School Climate Survey Variables*, Elementary, Middle School Faculty Version (Revised)

Variable	Definition
Achievement Motivation	The extent to which students at the school believe that they can learn and are willing to learn.
Collaborative Decision-Making	The involvement of parents, students, and staff in the decisions affecting the school.
Equity and Fairness	The equal treatment of students regardless of ethnicity or gender.
Leadership	The principal's role in guiding the direction of the school and in creating a positive climate.
Order and Discipline	Appropriateness of student behavior in the school setting.
School Building	The appearance of the school building.
School/Parent/Community Relations	The support and involvement of parents and the community in the life of the school.
Staff Dedication to Student Learning	The effort of teachers to get students to learn.
Staff Expectations	The expectations of staff members that students will do well academically and will lead a successful life.

3.7.2 *Plus/Delta School Evaluation*

The *Plus/Delta School Evaluation instrument* was used to collect open-ended data during this study. This survey instrument was chosen because it allowed the researcher to collect open-ended responses from participants that can be analyzed to ascertain what trends may arise from the group. Participant's responses are not constrained like closed-ended surveys, which allow the survey takers to include additional details that may not be captured by a close-ended survey (Huba & Freed, 2000). The *Plus/Delta School Evaluation* can be utilized to collect information that allows researchers to better understand how participants' view the performance of an organization (Huba & Freed, 2000). Responses to this survey instrument are open-ended. Each participant completes a list of Pluses (+, *Strengths*) and Deltas (Δ , *Areas for Improvement*) that the researcher can use to evaluate the organization's performance (Huba & Freed, 2000). Responses to this instrument are coded as either + or Δ by the researchers. In this multi-case study, responses were also categorized according to the nine variables assessed by the *School Climate Survey* with the addition of a tenth variable "*Other*." The tenth variable was added to capture comments that did not align with the nine variables assessed by the *School Climate Survey*. Responses submitted to the *Plus/Delta School Evaluation* instrument were also used by the researcher to generate questions for the semi-structured focus group interviews. The researcher examined comment trends that were submitted by the staff at each school to generate those questions.

To protect study participants' anonymity, survey data was collected using the web-based *Google Docs Survey* application, which did not collect any personally identifiable information.

3.8 Focus Group Interviews

Semi-structured, focus group interviews were used in this study to inform the data received from the *Comer School Climate Survey and Plus/Delta School Evaluation* instrument. The data from those interviews was used specifically for confirmation and clarification of the findings that emerged from surveys.

Semi-structured, focus group interviews allow the researcher to confirm and clarify previous findings. This instrument also allows the researcher to facilitate comparisons during the secondary analysis of the study data (Wholey, Hatry, & Newcomer, 2010). Utilizing focus groups allows participants to express their opinions and concerns in a brief time with little preparation or effort on the part of the participants. Further, researchers also are able to observe group dynamics and organizational issues. In addition, focus groups can be used to stimulate spontaneous reactions and ideas. Limitations of using focus groups include: subjective bias risk and the potential for data analysis to be labor intensive and thus time consuming for the researcher (Wholey, Hatry, & Newcomer, 2010). Several topics were explored to mitigate the limitations of focus groups. Those topics included: examining staff's diverse roles within their school; fact checking for accuracy in recorded notes; use of a standard coding process to analyze focus group data; and expert debriefings to check for researcher bias (Wholey, Hatry, & Newcomer, 2010; Krueger & Casey, 2009).

One focus group interview was conducted at each of the participating schools. The researcher relied on the principal at each school to recruit the focus group participants. The principals were encouraged to recruit sample population representative of the various roles within the school. The focus groups ranged in size from 4 to 6 members. All of the focus groups were composed mostly of teachers. Each focus group also included the principal. All of the schools with the exception of School Three included a staff member was not a teacher such as counselor or instructional coach. The length of focus group sessions were approximately 30-minutes. The interviews were divided into four loose discussion topics. The four discussion topics were guided by the initial finding from the *Comer School Climate Survey and Plus/Delta School Evaluation* instrument. The complete interview protocols are contained in Appendix D. Table 3.8.1 contains an overview of the four discussion topics that made up the focus group interviews.

Table 3.8.1: Overview of Focus Group Interview Discussion Topics

Group Discussion - Topic 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you were to describe the climate in your school in two sentences or less, what would you say? • How would you characterize the greatest strengths of your school? • How would you characterize the Areas for Improvement in your school? • What do you believe the greatest challenge to academic achievement for students in your school is? *(Remember to ask probing questions)
Group Discussion - Topic 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review findings of survey instruments for the school • Identify top 2 Strengths and Top 2 Areas for Improvement • Do you agree with this assessment of your school's strengths and areas for improvement? • *(Remember to ask probing questions)

Group Discussion - Topic 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distribute list of variables measured by the study instruments • Which if any of the factors on the list contributes most to success in your school? • Which if any of the factors on the list contributes presents the greatest challenge in your school? • *(Remember to ask probing questions)
Final thoughts -Topic 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there any additional comments that you believe would contribute to gaining a better understanding of the overall character of your school? • *(Remember to ask probing questions & ask clarifying questions) • Stop recording • *Make sure to save audio file in the correct folder and designate the school number

Because of the time constraints, during the course of the session participants were encouraged to submit personal notes using the *Google Docs* web-based survey tool. The submitted notes provided the researcher with additional data to be considered; this option was made available in case participants were not able or willing to publicly respond to particular questions during the focus group interview.

An audio recording was made of each focus group interview and transcribed to allow the researcher to code responses from the focus group sessions and compare them to the results received from the *Comer School Climate Survey and Plus/Delta School Evaluation* instruments. The data from the transcripts of the semi-structure focus group interview were coded using the worksheet in Appendix E. That worksheet allowed the researcher to identify comments made during the focus group interviews with the variable that were measured by the two aforementioned survey instruments. The researcher also identified if those comment fit into the + or Δ category. Figure 3.8.1 contains an outline of the worksheet the researcher used to code the focus group interviews along with the code book.

Table 3.8.2: Interview Coding Worksheet and Code Book

	Comments Include variable alignment (1- 10) & category alignment (+, Δ, or ∅) (i.e., “Positive comment about the facilities” (7)(+))
Discussion 1	
Discussion 2	
Discussion 3	
Discussion 4	
Code Book	
Variable	Category
1 = Achievement Motivation 2 = Collaborative Decision-Making 3= Equity and Fairness 4 = Leadership 5 = Order and Discipline 6 = School Building 7 = School/Parent/Community Relations 8 = Staff Dedication to Student Learning 9 = Staff Expectations 10 = Other	(+) Strength (Δ) Area for Improvement (∅) Neutral

3.9 Settings

The researcher selected four rural/town South Carolina schools as research sites based on geographic location, demographic data, and state reported school ratings. The schools chosen for this study were located in rural/town areas of South Carolina. The researcher evaluated the schools that were selected to participate in this study to ensure that demographic data in terms of race/ethnicity and poverty levels were similar. The student populations for all of the schools that were included in this study were predominantly composed of ethnic minorities (School One (66.7%), School Two (64.0 %) School Three (75.0 %), & School Four (67.2 %)). The researcher identified poverty rates at the participating schools using the poverty index (PI) as reported by the SC State Department of Education. The poverty index for all of the schools was above 90 (School One (95.51), School Two (92.61) School Three (98.90), & School Four (92.31)). The poverty index indicates the percentage of students eligible for free or reduced lunch. Eligibility for free or reduced lunch is determined by family income and family size (SCDOE.2013). Another consideration was the schools' ratings as reported by the State of South Carolina. School ratings are reported on a 5-point scale (E = Excellent, G = Good, A = Average, B = Below Average, U = Underperforming). Ratings are based on students' performance on the PASS Exam. Ratings are reported in terms of absolute performance and growth in each school. The absolute rating is based on the overall scores achieved by students in the school. The growth rating is based on the amount of academic growth students exhibited on the PASS exam between grade levels (SCSDE, 2012). School One and School Two ranked in the upper quartile of South Carolina elementary

schools for performance on the PASS exam. School One had an absolute rating of “G” and a growth rating of “E.” School Two had an absolute rating of “G” and a growth rating of “E.” School Three and School Four ranked in the bottom quartile of South Carolina elementary schools. School Three had an absolute rating of “U” and a growth rating of “B” (SCSDE, 2013). School Three had an absolute rating of “B” and a growth rating of “U.” Table 3.9.1 contains demographic information related to all schools included in this study:

Table 3.9.1: Active Enrollment Research Study Schools by Poverty Index, Ratings, Race or Ethnic Origin

Source: 45th Extraction, November, 2013(QDC1)

School	Poverty Index	School Rating Absolute/Growth	Total # Actively Enrolled Students	Race/Ethnicity				
				African-American/ Black	American Indian	Asian/Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander	Hispanic	White
1	95.51	G/E	310	76	3	8	120	103
2	92.61	E/G	200	125	0	0	3	72
3	98.90	U/B	260	184	0	1	10	65
4	92.31	B/U	352	214	1	11	11	115

Table 3.9.2 provides base line data related to each school collected from the 2013 state report cards (SCDOE, 2013).

Table 3.9.2 Participating School Baseline Data

Data Point	School Category			
	High - Achieving		Low – Achieving	
	<i>School #1</i>	<i>School #2</i>	<i>School #3</i>	<i>School #4</i>
Principal's Years at School	15	2	7	3.5
# of Teachers	24	14	24	28
Student-Teacher Ratio	16:1	N/R	8.5:1	16.8:1
Classes Not Taught by Highly Qualified	0%	0%	0%	0%
Teachers w/ Advanced Degrees	75%	85.7%	54.2%	71.4%
Teacher Returned from Previous School Year	88.6%	91.4%	82.2%	92.5%
Prime Instructional Time	88.6%	91.1%	89.5%	88.2%
of Students w/ Disabilities	16.6%	19.7%	19%	17.1%

Source: SCDOE School Report Card Data School Year 2013-14

Due to the wide geographic distribution of the participating schools and time constraints, the researcher was unable to spend a large amount of time observing each school. To ensure consistent reporting of the setting of the participating schools the researcher made limited descriptions to general observations of the communities in which each of the schools were situated. The researcher also made general observations

regarding the appearance of the school buildings' interiors and grounds. The following subsections provide these descriptions of the setting for each participating school.

3.9.1 School One

School One was part of a large school district in a fringe rural area of the district. This part of the district was considered the Latino part of town. The population in this area was predominately Latino (US Census, 2010). There were a number of impoverished neighborhoods in close proximity to School One. The outer appearance of the school building appeared to be well kept and the landscaping appeared to be well-maintained. The interior of the building was clean in appearance and appeared to be well maintained. The classrooms the researcher observed were spacious, clean, and well organized.

3.9.2 School Two

School Two was part of a small rural school district. There was not much industry in this school district. The school was surrounded by farmland. There were also a number of closed textile mills that were close to the school. The population in this section of the district was predominately African-American (US Census, 2010). The outer appearance of the school building appeared to be well kept and the landscaping appeared to be well-maintained. The interior of the building was clean in appearance and appeared to be well maintained. The classrooms observed were spacious, clean, and well-organized.

3.9.3 School Three

School Three as part of a medium-sized school district as compared to other school district in the state. There was not much industry in this section of the school district. The school was located in the center a former mill village. These houses appeared to be older and a number of them appeared to be abandoned. The population in this section of the district was predominately African-American (US Census, 2010). The mill, which employed much of the local population, closed down a decade prior to this study. There were also a number of closed textile mills that were close to the school. The outer appearance of the school building was weathered. There was not much landscaping around the school as it was bordered by neighborhood a street on each of it's for sides. The interior of the building was clean in appearance and appeared although there were a number of cracked tiles and other visible signs of the age of the facilities. The classrooms the researcher observed were spacious, clean, and well-organized.

3.9.4 School Four

School Four as part of a medium-sized school district as compared to other school district in the state. There was not much industry in this section of the school district. The school was located near a large trailer park and a United States military training facility. The population in this section of the district was predominately African-American (US Census, 2010). Most of the business close to the school appeared to be retail outlets. There were also a number of closed textile mills that were close to the school. The outer appearance of the school building was weathered. There was little shrubbery on the

school grounds. The playground equipment appeared to be older and weathered. The interior of the building was clean in appearance and appeared although there were a number of cracked tiles and other visible signs of the age of the facilities. The classrooms the research observed were small and cluttered with storage boxes. The walls in the classrooms were collapsible and allowed for classrooms to be combined.

3.10 Sampling Methods & Participants

The sample population for this study was recruited from the faculty, staff, and administration of the participating schools. For this study, the term staff was used to refer to any adult who consistently worked with children at the participating schools.

Permission to engage in the study was obtained from the administration in all of the school districts where the study took place. Recruitment among the staff took place via email messages sent by the principal at each school to their staffs. The same group of participants from each school completed both the *Comer School Climate Survey and Plus/Delta School Evaluation* instruments. After preliminary analysis of the data from both instruments, a smaller sample population representative of the various roles within the school was taken to provide feedback on the aggregate data received from the entire population surveyed at each school. This sample population was recruited by the principal. For all four schools, the focus groups were primarily composed of teachers. Each focused group also included one administrator. Focus groups at two of the schools also included non-teaching staff such as counselors and instructional coaches. Table

3.10.1 details the demographic information for each of the participating schools for respondents to the survey instruments.

Table 3.10.1: Study Participant Demographics (Survey Instruments)

School	n	Average years of Experience	Gender		Race/Ethnicity				
			M	F	African-American/ Black	American Indian	Asian/ Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander	Hispanic	White
1	19	11.3	2	17	0	0	0	0	19
2	12	18.0	1	11	1	0	0	0	11
3	13	11.3	1	12	1	0	0	0	12
4	19	10.4	2	17	2	0	0	0	18

Tables 3.10.2 and 3.10.3 detail the demographic make-up of the semi-structured focus group. The position of participants is not aligned with the other demographic data in order to maintain anonymity.

Table 3.10.2: Focus Group Participant Demographics

School	n	Gender		Race/Ethnicity				
		M	F	African-American/ Black	American Indian	Asian/ Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander	Hispanic	White
1	6	1	5	0	0	0	0	6
2	4	1	3	1	0	0	0	3
3	4	0	4	1	0	0	0	3
4	4	0	4	0	0	0	0	4

Table 3.10.3: Focus Group Staff Positions

School One	School Three
6 – Total Participants 1 – Principal 1 – Academic Coach 1 – Counselor 3 – Teachers	4 – Total Participants 1 – Principal 1 – Academic Coach 2 – Teachers
School Two	School Four

4 – Total Participants	4 – Total Participants
1 – Principal	1 – Principal
1 – Counselor	1 – Academic Coach
2 – Teachers	2 – Teachers

3.11 Archival Data & Observational Data

In this mixed-methods study the researcher-collected data from a variety of sources. Initially, archival data was utilized to obtain base line data on each of the participating schools. Those data included student and staff demographics along with other specific information related to each of the participating schools. Those data were obtained from the school report cards for each school. School report cards for all public schools in South Carolina are published by the SC State Department of Education (SCDOE). The researcher also obtained data from the United States Census Bureau Website.

During site visits the researcher made observations related to the condition of the facilities of each of the participating schools. Due to time constraints and the geographic locations of the participating schools, the researcher was unable to conduct intensive observations of the school settings during the school day. Meetings with the staff and faculty at two the locations took place after school, which prevented the researcher from making observations during the school day.

When administering the *Comer School Climate Survey and Plus/Delta School Evaluation instrument*, the researcher sought to sample as much of the staff from the participating schools as possible (Creswell, 2012). Participation in completing the *Comer School Climate Survey and Plus/Delta School Evaluation instrument* was solicited via an

email from the principal in each of the participating schools. Staff members were made aware that their participation was optional.

Further data were collected during semi-structured focus group interviews. The semi-structured focus groups were also recruited by the principal in each school with guidance from the researcher. Each focus group included the principal along with four other staff members. For most of the participating schools those staff member were composed of three teachers along with a staff member such as a counselor or instructional coach. The focus group interviews were intended to inform the researcher's analysis of initial finding form the *Comer School Climate Survey and Plus/Delta School Evaluation* instrument regarding staffs' perceptions of school, *Strengths, Areas for Improvement*. Data from the focus group interviews was specifically used to confirm and clarify the findings from the initial surveys.

3.12 Data Analysis

3.12.1 *Comer School Climate Survey*

As previously mentioned, the *Comer School Climate Survey* measures nine variables associated with school climate. Cronbach's α was the reliability statistic used to confirm the reliability of the items included on the *Comer School Climate Survey*. The reliability of the items included on the *Comer School Climate Survey* were validated and confirmed at the Yale Child Study Center (CSDP, 2012). Cronbach's α is commonly used in the social sciences to estimate the internal consistency or reliability of a psychometric

test (Kline, 2000, p.13). Values above .6 are generally considered acceptable for low-stakes testing within the social sciences (Kline, 2000). Measures of reliability for this instrument were verified by the Child Study Center at Yale University (CSDP, 2012).

Table 3.12.1 contains the reliability statistics that are reported for each of the variables on the *Comer School Climate Survey*.

Table 3.12.1: Reliability Statistics for the *Comer School Climate Survey*

Variable	Reliability (α)
Achievement Motivation	0.78
Collaborative Decision-Making	0.84
Equity and Fairness	0.86
Leadership	0.90
Order and Discipline	0.93
School Building	0.87
School/Parent/Community Relations	0.89
Staff Dedication to Student Learning	0.85
Staff Expectations	0.87

Participants responded to fifty-four survey items, rating them on a five-point Likert scale. Respondents were instructed to answer the questions based on how well they thought the statement described their school. Response options included: 1- strongly disagree, 2- disagree, 3 – neutral, 4 – agree, 5 – strongly agree. Responses were coded

with point values that correspond to each rating on the Likert scale. Where: strongly agree = 5, agree = 4, neutral = 3, disagree = 2, strongly disagree = 1. For this instrument, items: 2, 3, 4, 9, 14, 15, 20, 26, 30, 31, and 47 were reverse scored following frequency analysis for each item. Reverse scoring was used for those items because agreement with those statements corresponds to a negative perception of school climate; whereas, disagreement with those statements corresponds to a positive perception of school climate.

The variables were all scored in the positive direction. Higher scores indicate a more positive perception of that variable by the survey participants. The highest possible value for a variable is 5.0. The lowest possible mean score is 1.0. The scores recorded for each participant were averaged with the scores of other participants from the same school. Those averages generated the overall mean (μ) for each variable.

The researcher initially identified *Strengths* and *Areas for Improvement* as perceived by the staff at each of the participating schools based on the μ for each of the variables measured by the *Comer School Climate Survey*. As previously mentioned, schools reported scores on a five-point Likert scale, where 5 is the positive correlate. *Strengths* for each school were initially identified by isolating variables that generated a $\mu \geq 4.5$ on the *Comer School Climate Survey*. *Areas for Improvement* were initially identified for each school by isolating variables that generated a $\mu \leq 3.5$. If no $\mu \leq 3.5$ for a school, *Areas for Improvement* were identified by isolating the two variables that generated the lowest value for μ on the *Comer School Climate Survey*.

To facilitate comparisons between the high-achieving schools and low-achieving schools using the *Comer School Climate Survey* data, the researcher calculated two additional statistics. The first was the average mean score for both school categories on the *Comer School Climate Survey*. The average mean score is denoted as (μ_1) for the high-achieving schools and (μ_2) for the low-achieving schools. This value is generated by average the μ for the schools in each category (high-achieving and low-achieving). The other statistic is the difference of average mean scores (μ_d). μ_d is calculated by taking the difference of μ_1 and μ_2 ($\mu_d = \mu_1 - \mu_2$).

3.12.2 Plus/Delta School Evaluation

For the *Plus/Delta Evaluation*, each participant completed an open-ended list of Pluses (+, *Strengths*) and Deltas (Δ , *Areas for Improvement*) that the researcher used to evaluate school performance (Huba & Freed, 2000). The researcher coded responses according to the nine variables that were assessed using the *Comer School Climate Survey* with the addition of a tenth variable, *Other*, which captured responses that did not align with any of the variables measured by the QUAN instrument. Comments were coded as either (+) or (Δ). Each (+) comment was assigned a numeric value of +1 and each (Δ) comment was assigned a value of -1. Point totals were calculated for each variable to indicate if the perception of staff members was positive (+1), negative (-1), or neutral (0) based on responses to the *Plus/Delta Evaluation* instrument.

The point totals for each variable were then used to calculate the *Plus Delta Index Score*. This value is calculated by assigning each variable to a category Plus (+), Delta

(Δ), or Neutral (\emptyset) based on the recorded point total from each school. Variables for which the majority of comments aligned with the *Plus* category are denoted with (+). Variables for which the majority of comments aligned with the *Delta* category are denoted with (Δ). Variables for which the point totals were equal to zero are denoted with (\emptyset). Point values are assigned to each category: (+) = +1, (Δ) = -1 and (\emptyset) = 0. The point totals for the schools in each category are combined to produce the *Plus/Delta Index Score*. For this study, the *Plus/Delta Index Score* could have a maximum value of +10 and a minimum value of -10.

3.12.3 Semi-Structured Focus Groups

As discussed in section 3.7, semi-structured focus group interviews were used in this study to inform the data received from the *Comer School Climate Survey and Plus/Delta School Evaluation* instrument. The data from those interviews was used specifically for confirmation and clarification of the findings that emerged from surveys. One focus group interview was conducted at each of the participating schools. The focus groups ranged in size from 4 to 6 members. All of the focus groups were composed mostly of teachers. Each focus group also included the principal. All of the schools with the exception of School Three included a staff member who was not a teacher such as counselor or instructional coach. The length of each focus group session was approximately 30-minutes. The interviews were divided into four loose discussion topics. The four discussion topics were guided by the initial findings from the *Comer School Climate Survey and Plus/Delta School Evaluation* instrument.

After the focus group interviews were transcribed, the researcher coded each focus group interview using the worksheet displayed in figure 3.7.1. The researcher used the worksheet to code the data according to the four discussion topics that were explored during each focus group interview. The work sheet also assisted the researcher in finding trends such as the variable from the previously administered surveys comments from each discussion aligned with. Lastly, the researcher was able to categorize comments as +, Δ, or Ø. Comments categorized as (+) were associated with a positive disposition towards the topic of discussion or variables the staff viewed as a *Strength* at their school. Comments categorized as (Δ) were associated with a negative disposition towards the topic of discussion or a variable the staff viewed as *An Area for Improvement* for their school. Comments categorized as (Ø) were associated with a neutral disposition towards the topic of discussion or a variable the staff viewed as neither a *Strength* nor *An Area for Improvement*. After coding the focus group interviews, the researcher analyzed those data to find trends and poignant quotes that encapsulated the tenor of the focus group interviews. The researcher cross referenced those trends and quotes with field notes the researcher recorded during the focus group interviews. Analysis of the coded data from the transcripts of the focus group interviews assisted the researcher in ascertaining what dispositions of staff at each of the participating schools possessed in regards to the climate at their schools.

As discussed in section 3.7 there are number of limitations that are associated with focus group interviews. Several strategies were used to mitigate those limitations. The strategies included: examining staff's diverse roles within their school; fact checking

for accuracy in recorded notes; use of a standard coding process to analyze focus group data; and expert debriefings to check for researcher bias (Wholey, Hatry, & Newcomer, 2010; Krueger & Casey, 2009).

3.13 Interpretation of Results

Interpretation of results is a reflective process in which the researcher seeks to identify patterns within the data and draw meaning from those patterns (Creswell, 2012; Yin, 2008; Stake, 1995). Context is an essential element of a multi-case study. The researcher must provide rich description of the individual cases included in the study to contextualize the findings that emerged within and between cases (McMillian, 2008). Interpretation of the data necessitates a structured process that will allow the researcher to create a logical sequence for organizing and analyzing the data (Creswell, 2012). Creswell (2012) also proposes a process for interpreting case study data: (a) Prepare and organize the data; (b) Explore and code data; (c) Code to create context; (d) Report the findings; (e) Interpret findings; (f) Validate accuracy.

Interpretation of the data from this study was organized into several stages. First, base line data related to each participating school was collected from archival source such as the state school report card for each school. This provided some context for the environment each school is situated in. Results from the both the *Comer School Climate Survey* and *Plus/Delta Evaluation* instrument were cross-reference to identify trends related to staff perceptions of school climate. The initial findings from the survey instruments were used to create items for the interview protocol the researcher included

to assist with gaining greater context of each case. The researcher recorded field notes during the focus group interviews and used those notes in addition to the survey findings when interpreting the data collected from the focus group interviews. The researcher cross referenced multiple sources of data to confirm trends within the data and draw meaning from those trends and explanations set forth in the open-ended responses collected by the Plus/Delta Evaluation instrument and focus group interviews.

3.14 Credibility

3.14.1 Triangulation

The credibility of this study was primarily established through the use of between methods triangulation. Denzin (1978) defined between methods triangulation as “the combination of methodologies in the study of the same phenomenon” (p. 291). The use of triangulation has several advantages, which can enhance the credibility and conformability of the study being undertaken (Creswell, 2012; Green, 2006; Morgan, 2006). Advantages of triangulation include: Increase confidence in results; it can lead to thicker, richer data; it can uncover contradictions (Denzin, 1978).

In Mixed-Methods research there are a number of ways in which triangulation may occur. Denzin (1978) defined four types of triangulation:

- (a) data triangulation - use of a variety of sources in a study
- (b) investigator triangulation - use of several different researchers
- (c) theory triangulation - use of multiple perspectives and theories to interpret the results of a study

(d) methodological triangulation - use of multiple methods to study a research problem

Data triangulation was established by collecting data from a variety of sources. Data for this study was collected from: the *Comer School Climate Survey, Plus/Delta Evaluation* instrument, semi-structures focus interviews, and archival data (e.g., school report cards).

For both survey instruments, the researcher collected data from the greatest proportion of staff possible. Although the population for the semi-structured focus groups was smaller, the researcher attempted to include individuals with varying roles within the school to capture as diverse a sample as possible in each school.

Investigator triangulation was established in this study using a variety of techniques. First, the researcher conferred with experts knowledgeable in mixed-methods, qualitative, and quantitative research regarding the research design and data analysis for this study. In addition, the results of the *Comer School Climate Survey* were reviewed by an outside consultant who reviewed the analysis to ensure the results were scored accurately. Those finding were used as part of this study. For the semi-structure focus groups, member checking was used to ensure the accuracy of information that was recorded by the researcher. The researcher checked with focus group members to make sure that the recorded data was accurate and conveyed in a manner consistent with the views of the participants.

Lastly, expert debriefings were performed. Experts who were not engaged in this study questioned the researcher to probe for any personal biases and to assist the researcher in clarifying the data analysis and conclusions drawn from the study.

A number of methodologies were employed during this study. Data was initially collected using the *Comer School Climate Survey* and the *Plus/Delta School Evaluation instrument*. The *Comer School Climate Survey* was used to close ended data; results from that instrument were scored and reviewed by an outside consultant to confirm that scores were calculated accurately. The *Plus/Delta School Evaluation instrument* is an open-ended survey that can be used to generate data. The researcher coded results from this survey to identify trends. The results of both surveys were used to identify trends and create probing questions for the semi-structured focus group interviews. During the semi-structured focus group interviews the researcher dictated field notes that were later coded to identify themes. Participants in the focus groups were encouraged to submit comments that were later reviewed along with the researcher's field notes. Furthermore, the semi-structured focus groups were audio recorded and transcribed. Transcription of the focus group sessions assisted the researcher in confirming and clarifying the initial findings from the survey instruments.

3.14.2 Transferability

According to Trochim (2006), transferability refers to “the degree to which the results of research can be generalized or transferred to other contexts or settings.” The inclusion of a wide array of data sources and thick description would allow one to

determine if the findings of this study can be applied in other cases. Further study is needed to determine the level of transferability the findings of this study has to elementary schools with similar demographics situated in similar communities.

3.14.3 Reliability, Dependability, Confirmability

Dependability for the qualitative data included in this study was established using protocols established by Lincoln and Guba (1989). This audit trail serves as evidence to bolster the reliability of this study. The audit trail for this study includes:

- (1.) Raw Data (i.e., field notes, supplemental comments from focus group participants, transcription of audio recordings, Plus/Delta Survey results)
- (2.) Data Reduction and Analysis (i.e., coding of Plus/Delta survey results, write up of field notes, summaries, comparison of *Comer School Climate Survey* results with qualitative data, working hypotheses)
- (3.) Data Reconstruction and Synthesis (Lincoln & Guba, 1989)
- (4.) Process Notes (i.e., methodological notes including procedures, strategies, decisions and rationale, documentation regarding trustworthiness including expert debriefing, member checking, etc.)
- (5.) Procedural notes detailing procedures, strategies, rationale
- (6.) Instrument Development (i.e., protocols, Plus/Delta Evaluation, *Comer School Climate Survey*, Focus group questions, and rationale for identifying emergent themes from qualitative data)
- (7.) Triangulation of Emergent Themes with the Plus/Delta Evaluation and *Comer School Climate Survey* Results (i.e., detailed explanation of rationale for cross matching emergent themes from qualitative data sources with the results from the *Comer School Climate Survey*)

Confirmability is used to ensure that the results of a study emerge from the experiences and ideas of the study participants rather than any biases of the researcher

(Lincoln & Guba, 1989). Confirmability of this study was established using an audit trail, expert debriefings, and between methods triangulation of data sources.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

A summary of the findings from the *Comer School Climate Survey, Plus/Delta Evaluation*, the semi-structured focus group interviews, and archival/observational data are presented in this chapter. It also includes a summary of the demographic and academic achievement data from the participating schools. The purpose of this study was to investigate by four elementary schools in rural South Carolina as perceived by the faculty, staff, and administration at those schools. The results of this study do not represent a generalization of all schools in South Carolina with similar demographic C. Rather than provide a generalization of similar schools, this study provided a detailed analysis of the school climate, *Strengths*, and *Areas for Improvement* as perceived by the faculty, staff, and administration at the schools that participated in this study.

1. What challenges to students' academic performance were identified by the staff?
2. How did study participants characterize their schools' strengths and areas for improvement and/or change?
3. How do the results compare for the schools that participated in this study?

4.2 Demographic Data

This section details the demographic data for study's participating schools. More specifically, the four schools were comprised of predominantly students of color (School One [66.7%], School Two [64.0 %], School Three [75.0 %], and School Four [67.2 %]). The poverty index for all of the schools was above 90 (School One [95.51], School Two [92.61], School Three [98.90], and School Four [92.31]). The poverty index indicates the percentage of students eligible for free or reduced lunch. Eligibility for free or reduced lunch is determined by family income and family size (SCDOE, 2012). Another consideration in selecting participants was the schools' ratings, as reported by the State of South Carolina, and the school ratings were reported on a 5-point scale (E = Excellent, G = Good, A = Average, B = Below Average, U = Underperforming). Ratings are based on student performance on the Palmetto Assessment of State Standards (PASS) Exam. Further, the ratings were reported as absolute performance and growth in each school, and the absolute rating was based on the overall scores achieved by students in the school. The growth rating was based on the amount of academic growth students, as exhibited on the PASS exam among grade levels (SCSDE, 2012). School One and School Two ranked in the upper quartile of South Carolina elementary schools for performance on the PASS exam. School One had an absolute rating of "G" and a growth rating of "E." School Two had an absolute rating of "G" and a growth rating of "E." School Three and School Four ranked in the bottom quartile of South Carolina elementary schools, but School Three possessed an absolute rating of "U" and a growth rating of "B" (SCSDE,

2013). Additionally, it had an absolute rating of “B” and a growth rating of “U.” Table

4.2.1 contains more demographic information on the participating schools.

Table 4.2.1: Active Enrollment Research Study Schools by Poverty Index, Ratings, Race or Ethnic Origin

School	Poverty Index	School Rating Absolute/Growth	Total # Actively Enrolled Students	Race/Ethnicity				
				African-American/ Black	American Indian	Asian/Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	Hispanic	White
1	95.51	G/E	310	76	3	8	120	103
2	92.61	E/G	200	125	0	0	3	72
3	98.90	U/B	260	184	0	1	10	65
4	92.31	B/U	352	214	1	11	11	115

Source: 45th Extraction, November, 2013(QDC1)

The study’s sample was recruited from staff at each of the participating schools. For this study, the term staff referred to any adults who spent significant time working in the participating schools. Permission to engage in the study was obtained from the administration in all of the school districts where data collections occurred. Staff recruitment occurred through electronic communications (e.g., e-mail), which were facilitated by the principal of each school. The same group of participants from each school completed both the *Comer School Climate Survey* and *Plus/Delta School Evaluation*. After the analysis of the survey data, a convenient sample of participants provided feedback on findings generated from the survey instruments. The primary purpose of this feedback was to provide confirmation and clarification of those findings.

4.3 Presentation of Findings

The remaining sections in Chapter IV present the findings of this study based on a comparative analysis of the study data generated by the participating schools. The four schools were divided into two categories, “high-achieving” and “low-achieving.”

Findings from the survey instruments, semi-structured focus group interviews, and archival/observational data were cross referenced in order to compare and contrast the characteristics of the schools that were classified as high-achieving and low-achieving. The findings of the semi-structured focus group interviews were used to confirm and clarify the finding that emerged from the data generated by the survey instruments and archival/observational data.

4.3.1 Comer School Climate Survey Results

This section highlights the results of the Comer School Climates Survey, which measures nine variables associated with school climate and culture by the Comer School Development Program (Comer & Emmons, 2006). For this study, participants responded to fifty-four survey items, rating them on a five-point Likert scale. All participants were instructed to answer the items, based on how well they thought the statement described their school. Response options were: 1- strongly disagree, 2- disagree, 3 – neutral, 4 – agree, and 5 – strongly agree, and all responses were coded with point values that corresponded to each rating on the Likert scale. The variables were also scored in the positive direction, with higher scores indicating a more positive perception of the variable.

The highest possible value for a variable was 5.0, and the lowest possible mean score was 1.0. Additionally, the scores recorded for each participant were averaged with the scores of other participants from the same school. Those averages generated the overall mean (μ) for each variable.

The researcher initially identified *Strengths* and *Areas for Improvement* as perceived by the staff at each of the participating schools based on the μ for each of the variables measured by the *Comer School Climate Survey*. *Strengths* for each school were initially identified by isolating variables that generated a $\mu \geq 4.5$ on the *Comer School Climate Survey*. *Areas for Improvement* were initially identified for each school by isolating variables that generated a $\mu \leq 3.5$. If no $\mu \leq 3.5$ for a school, *Areas for Improvement* were identified by isolating the two variables that generated the lowest value for μ on the *Comer School Climate Survey*. Table 4.3.1.2 displays the μ each school reported for the variables measured by the School Climate Survey.

Table 4.3.1.1: *Comer School Climate Survey* Mean Scores by School

Variable	Overall Mean (μ)			
	High-Achieving		Low-Achieving	
	School 1 N = 19	School 2 N = 12	School 3 N = 13	School 4 N = 19
Achievement Motivation	4.5	4.2	2.9	3.6
Collaborative Decision-Making	4.3	4.1	4.2	3.5
Equity and Fairness	4.8	4.8	4.6	4.5
Leadership	4.5	4.4	4.5	3.6
Order and Discipline	4.3	3.7	2.5	3.2
School Building	4.9	4.7	4.1	3.3
School/Parent/Community Relations	2.9	3.6	2.4	3.1
Staff Dedication to Student Learning	4.7	4.6	4.4	4.6
Staff Expectations	4.2	4.0	4.0	3.9
Average	4.3	4.2	3.7	3.7
Average by School Category	4.25		3.70	

In order to facilitate comparisons between the high-achieving schools and low-achieving schools using the *Comer School Climate Survey*, the researcher calculated two

additional statistics. The first was the average mean score for both school categories on the *Comer School Climate Survey*. The average mean score was denoted as (μ_1) for the high-achieving schools and (μ_2) for the low-achieving schools. This statistic was used by the researcher to identify which variables were *Strengths* and *Areas for Improvement* for each category of school (e.g., high-achieving or low-achieving). These were identified using the same criteria mentioned earlier in this section.

The other statistic was the difference of average mean scores (μ_d). μ_d is calculated by taking the difference of μ_1 and μ_2 ($\mu_d = \mu_1 - \mu_2$). The researcher identified *Areas of Differing Perception* using this statistic. Variables for which $\mu_d \geq 1.0$ were identified as *Areas of Differing Perception*. Table 4.3.1.3 details the value of each of the aforementioned statistics as that were calculated using the results of the School Climate Survey.

Table 4.3.1.2: Average Means (μ_1 , μ_2) and Difference of Average Means (μ_d) for the School Climate Survey

Variable	Average Means for the <i>Comer School Climate Survey</i>		Difference of Average Means
	High-Achieving Schools (μ_1)	Low-Achieving Schools (μ_2)	$\mu_d = \mu_1 - \mu_2$
Achievement Motivation	4.5	3.3	1.2
Collaborative Decision-Making	4.2	3.9	0.3
Equity and Fairness	4.8	4.6	0.2
Leadership	4.5	4.1	0.4
Order and Discipline	4.0	2.9	1.1
School Building	4.8	3.7	1.1
School/Parent/Community Relations	3.3	2.8	0.5
Staff Dedication to Student Learning	4.7	4.5	0.2
Staff Expectations	4.1	4.0	0.1
Average	4.3	3.8	.6

4.3.2 *Plus/Delta Evaluation Results*

This section highlights the results of the *Plus/Delta Evaluation*. Each participant completed an open-ended list of Pluses (+, *Strengths*) and Deltas (Δ , *Areas for Improvement*) that the researcher used to evaluate school performance (Huba & Freed, 2000). Each comment received a point value, positive (+1), negative (-1), or neutral (0) based on responses to the *Plus/Delta Evaluation* instrument. The point totals for each variable were totaled to determine if the net point value for each variable was positive, negative, or neutral. Table 4.3.2.1 displays the results obtained using the *Plus/Delta Evaluation* instrument. The table displays the total number of comments that participants' from each school submitted and the variables those comments aligned with. The point totals are shown for all variables for each of the participating schools respectively.

Table 4.3.2.1: Plus/Delta Evaluation Index of Scores by School

Variable	Comments				Plus				Delta				Total			
	School				School				School				School			
	#1	#2	#3	#4	#1	#2	#3	#4	#1	#2	#3	#4	#1	#2	#3	#4
Achievement Motivation	5	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	-2	0	0	0	+1	0	0	0
Collaborative Decision-Making	5	0	0	1	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	-1	+5	0	0	-1
Equity and Fairness	3	1	0	0	3	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	+3	+1	0	0
Leadership	3	0	11	0	3	0	8	0	0	0	-5	0	+3	0	+3	0
Order and Discipline	4	0	8	5	2	0	4	1	-2	0	-4	-4	0	0	0	-3
School Building	0	0	3	4	0	0	0	2	0	0	-3	-2	0	0	-3	0
School/Parent/Community Relations	2	2	10	3	0	2	5	3	-2	0	-5	-1	-2	+2	0	+2
Staff Dedication to Student Learning	7	6	21	11	5	5	21	10	-2	-1	0	-1	+3	+5	+21	+10
Staff Expectations	6	1	6	1	5	1	3	0	-1	0	-3	-1	+4	+1	0	-1
Other	17	13	11	9	9	6	5	3	8	-7	-6	-6	+1	-1	-1	-3

Data from Table 4.3.2.1 were used to calculate the *Plus Delta Index Score*. This value was calculated by assigning each variable to a category Plus (+), Delta (Δ), or Neutral (\emptyset) based on the recorded point total from each school. Variables for which the majority of comments aligned with the *Plus* category were denoted with Plus (+). Variables for which the majority of comments aligned with the *Delta* category were denoted with Delta (Δ). Variables for which the point totals were equal to zero are

denoted with Neutral (\emptyset). Point values were assigned to each category: (+) = +1, (Δ) = -1, and (\emptyset) = 0. The point totals for the schools in each category were computed to produce the *Plus/Delta Index Score*. For this study, the *Plus/Delta Index Score* could have a maximum value of +10 and a minimum value of -10. A score of +10 indicates an overall positive perception of school climate across all variables measured by this instrument. A score of -10 indicates a negative perception of school climate across all of the variables measured by this instrument. Table 4.3.2.2 displays the results of that analysis.

Table 4.3.2.2: Plus/Delta Evaluation Variable Categorizations by School

Variable	Category: + = +1 Δ = -1 Ø = 0			
	School			
	High-Achieving Schools		Low-Achieving Schools	
	#1	#2	#3	#4
Achievement Motivation	+	Ø	Ø	Ø
Collaborative Decision-Making	+	Ø	Ø	Δ
Equity and Fairness	+	+	Ø	Ø
Leadership	+	Ø	+	Ø
Order and Discipline	Ø	Ø	Ø	Δ
School Building	Ø	Ø	Δ	Ø
School/Parent/Community Relations	Δ	+	Ø	+
Staff Dedication to Student Learning	+	+	+	+
Staff Expectations	+	+	Ø	Δ
Other	+	Δ	Δ	Δ
Plus/Delta Index Score	+6	+4	0	-2
Average Plus/Delta Index Score	+4.5		-1	

4.4 Analysis of Findings

4.4.1 Analysis of School One Findings

Based on the findings of the School Climate Survey, three variables were initially identified as *Strengths* for School One. Those variables were *Achievement Motivation* ($\mu = 4.5$), *Equity and Fairness* ($\mu = 4.8$), *Leadership* ($\mu = 4.5$), *School Building* ($\mu = 4.9$), and *Staff Dedication to Student Learning* ($\mu = 4.7$). Data from the *Plus/Delta School Evaluation* instrument show that the majority of comments submitted that aligned with the variables *Achievement Motivation* (+), *Equity and Fairness* (+), *Leadership* (+), *School Building* (+), and *Staff Dedication to Student Learning* (+) fit into the *Plus* (+) category. No comments aligning with the variable *School Building* (\emptyset) were reported in the data from the *Plus/Delta School Evaluation* instrument.

Data from the transcript of the focus group interview for School One indicated that the staff had a positive perception of all five of the variables that were initially identified as *Strengths*, based on the findings of the School Climate Survey. The staff particularly reported positive perceptions to the variable *Achievement Motivation*. It was founded that staff at the school focused on intrinsic motivation techniques. Below are excerpts that support this finding.

School One – Participant Two

“We don’t have a rewards system. We focus on building personal relationships with students and setting high social expectations...This encourages students to be intrinsically motivated...They want to do well.”

The staff also made a number of comments in regards to *Staff Dedication to Student, Learning*.

School One – Participant One

“Our teachers and staff are what makes this school great...Everyone, including the custodians and kitchen staff, are dedicated to making sure our students receive the best educational experience possible.”

The focus group captured voices that expressed the importance of the free tutoring program operated by the school.

School One – Participant Four

“Our teachers show up early and stay after school to provide free tutoring for any students that needs it...Teachers at this school are really dedicated to making sure our students learn.”

Participants also commented on their perceptions of *Leadership* at the school. For example, several teachers expressed feeling supported by the principal.

School One – Participant Two

“Our principal gives us wings...We are encouraged to be innovators and find ways to help our students learn better.”

Additional comments were reported related to the variables *Equity and Fairness* and *School Building*. For example, several participants mentioned school practices in relation to tutoring and club activities.

School One – Participant Six

“[Free tutoring and free clubs] help to make things fair.”

Other staff also discussed the conditions of the facilities

School One – Participant Four

“[The condition of the building] is reflective of the pride we have in our school...Everyone is expected to help keep the school looking nice...It helps to set the tone in our building.”

Although not initially identified as *Strength*, after closely analyzing the focus group interviews, it was found that the staff at School One had a positive perception of *Staff Expectations* at their school. Through the focus group interview, several staff also mentioned the importance of setting high expectations for students multiple times throughout the interview.

School One – Participant Five

“We set high expectations for everything we do here...The students understand, this is the way we do things at [School One], and they rise to our expectations. Our school is driven by the high expectations every adult has for our children. The staff also mentioned the importance of factors such as the personal relationships among the staff and students. “We are like a family...Our teachers really know our students.”

Based on the findings of the *School Climate Survey*, two variables were initially identified as *Areas for Improvement* for School One. Those variables were *Staff Expectations* ($\mu = 4.1$), and *Staff School/Parent/Community Relations* ($\mu = 2.9$). Data from the *Plus/Delta School Evaluation instrument* show that the majority of comments submitted that aligned with *Staff Expectations* were in the (+) category. The majority of comments that aligned with *School/Parent/Community Relations* were in the (Δ) category. Those findings seemed to confirm the findings of the *School Climate Survey*, whereas *Staff Expectations* ($\mu = 4.2$) generated a mean score ≥ 3.5 , *School/Parent/Community Relations* ($\mu = 2.9$) generated a mean score well beneath that threshold. Individuals who participated in the focus group also expressed a positive perception of *Staff Expectations*. Specific comments provided clarification of the results

generated from the surveys in relation to *School/Parent/Community Relations*. As an example of this, several staff expressed positive perceptions of parental engagement at their school.

School One – Participant Two

“We have good parents.”

Additional comments clarified the reasons the staff perceived that parental engagement was low.

School One – Participant Three

“We don’t look down on our parents...Our parents work hard...They sacrifice to support their children...It costs many of them money to take time away from work to attend school events such as parent-teacher conferences.”

School One – Participant One

“Parents come to the school when they are invited...Some [parents] who do not have transportation walk here to support their children.”

School One – Participant Four

“A lack of presence does not mean a lack of involvement with them [their children]...They want to know what their children are doing.”

The staff also reported having positive perceptions of the support they received from local community organizations.

School One – Participant Two

“We receive a lot of support from local community organizations.”

Data taken from the transcript of the focus group interview do not support *Staff*

Expectations as an Area for Improvement.

School One – Participant Six

“We set high expectations for students.”

School One – Participant Four

“The reason why our students achieve [academically] is that we set high standards for them and they rise to meet them.”

An additional factor that emerged as an *Area for Improvement*, based on the transcript of the focus group interview, aligned with the variable *Other*. Staff reported that they needed to have more support for English as a Second or Other Language (ESOL) students.

School One – Participant Five

“Our population is 42% Hispanic, but we only have an interpreter available two days a week... If we had more support for our ESOL students we could help them even more.” “I think many of our parents would be more involved if we had a full-time Spanish interpreter.”

4.4.2 Analysis of School Two Findings

Based on the findings of the School Climate Survey, three variables were initially identified as *Strengths* for School Two. Those variables were *Equity and Fairness* ($\mu = 4.8$), *School Building* ($\mu = 4.7$), and *Staff Dedication to Student Learning* ($\mu = 4.6$). Data from the *Plus/Delta School Evaluation instrument* show that the majority of comments submitted that aligned with the variables *Equity and Fairness* and *Staff Dedication to Student Learning* fit into the (+) category. No comments aligning with the variable *School Building* ($\mu = 4.7$) were contained in the data from the *Plus/Delta School Evaluation instrument*. Data from the transcript of the focus group interview for School Two indicates that the staff had a positive perception of all three variables that were

initially identified as *Strengths* based on the findings of the School Climate Survey. The staff particularly reported positive perceptions in regards to *Staff Dedication to Student Learning* and *Equity and Fairness*.

Additional variables that were perceived favorably based on the data from the transcript of the focus group interview were *Leadership* and *Collaborative Decision-Making*. The focus group reported having positive perceptions of the principal's role as an instructional leader and problem solver within the school. They also reported having positive perceptions of the manner in which decisions were made within the school.

School Two – Participant Two

“I feel that my input is sought after by my principal and that staff input strongly influences what decisions are made here.”

School Two – Participant Four

“We don't believe there is any one magic bullet... We use the data and work together to come up with solutions that we think are best for our children.”

Based on the findings of the School Climate Survey, two variables were initially identified as *Areas for Improvement* for School Two. Those variables were *Order & Discipline* ($\mu = 3.7$), and *Staff School/Parent/Community Relations* ($\mu = 3.6$). Data from the *Plus/Delta School Evaluation instrument* show that the majority of comments submitted that aligned with the variables *Order & Discipline* and *School/Parent/Community Relations* fit into the (+) category. Although *Order & Discipline* and *School/Parent/Community Relations* were initially identified as *Areas for Improvement*, data from *Plus/Delta School Evaluation instrument* indicate that the staff had a positive perception of both of those variables. This may be explained by the fact

that both variables generated a $\mu \geq 3.5$ for the School Climate Survey. The staff particularly reported positive perceptions in regards to *School/Parent/Community Relations*. Data from the transcript of the focus group interview with School Two indicate a positive perception of *Order & Discipline*. Staff reported that students were generally well-behaved.

School Two – Participant Two

“We work very hard to make sure that behavior does not disrupt instruction at our school...The behavior issues we typically deal with are small. Things like talking in the hallway...We very rarely have serious behavior disruptions.”

School Two – Participant One

“We keep students actively engaged in academic activities from the time they enter our school, this minimizes behavior issues at our school. “You know, parental engagement is always something we could use more of.”

Data from the transcript of the focus group interview with School Two indicate a positive perception of *School/Parent/Community Relations*.

School Two – Participant Two

“Many of our parents drive long distances to work...It’s hard for them to consistently participate in school activities.”

School Two – Participant Three

“Most of our parents support our school when they can.”

Through the focus group, several participants expressed that parental engagement was high and community involvement with their school was positive.

School Two – Participant Two

“The school and our community are interwoven...People support our staff because we live in the community. We attend the same churches and

teachers coach little league teams.” “Parents trust us with their children because they know us.”

Despite those reports, the staff also reported a desire to increase the level of parental engagement at their school.

Additional factors that emerged as *Areas for Improvement* based on the data from the *Plus/Delta School Evaluation instrument* and the transcript of the focus group interview aligned with the variable *Other*. Based on the findings of the *Plus/Delta School Evaluation instrument* two factors emerged, tardies & absences and teachers having additional non-academic responsibilities. Staff reported that finding ways to decrease the number of student tardies & absences was an *Area for Improvement* at their school.

School Two – Participant One

“Tardies and absences take away from valuable time that students could be learning. We really need our students to get here and be here on time.”

Comments were also given in regards to teachers having none academic responsibilities.

School Two – Participant Four

“We have too many activities aside from teaching, like collecting and counting money for fundraisers. I would like to have fewer responsibilities like that.”

4.4.3 Analysis of School Three Findings

Based on the findings of the School Climate Survey, two variables were initially identified as *Strengths* for School Three. Those variables were *Equity and Fairness* ($\mu = 4.6$) and *Leadership* ($\mu = 4.5$). Data from the *Plus/Delta School Evaluation instrument* show that the majority of comments submitted that aligned with the variables *Equity and*

Fairness and *Leadership* are in the (+) category. Data from the transcript of the focus group interview for School Three indicates that the staff had a positive perception of both variables that were initially identified as *Strengths* based on the findings of the School Climate Survey. The staff particularly reported positive perceptions in regards to *Leadership*. A number of comments referred to the “family atmosphere” and the principal’s “open door policy” as positives in regards to school leadership.

School Three – Participant Three

“Our principal is very supportive. [The principal] is one of the reasons I enjoy working here... [The Principal] makes it feel like a family.”

Through the focus group, several participants expressed positive comments regarding *Equity and Fairness* in their school.

School Three – Participant One

“We emphasize treating every student like they are someone, regardless of their background.”

Additional factors that participants perceived in a positive manner, based on the data from the transcript of the focus group interview, are aligned with the variables *Staff Dedication to Student Learning* and *Other*. The staff reported having positive perceptions of the how dedicated staff members are to ensuring that students achieve academically.

School Three – Participant Three

“Our staff goes above and beyond to provide for the needs of our students.” “This can be a challenging environment, you have to be dedicated and love the kids to make it here.”

The staff also reported that relationships among the staff were a positive aspect of the school environment.

School Three – Participant Two

“It feels like a family ...that is what I love about working here.”

The staff reported feeling that there was a high level of positive interaction among the staff members. They also reported that the staff worked well together as a team to assist each other in meeting the needs of students.

Based on the findings of the *School Climate Survey*, three variables initially emerged as *Areas for Improvement* for School Three. Those variables were *Achievement Motivation* ($\mu = 2.9$), *Order and Discipline* ($\mu = 2.5$), and *Staff School/Parent/Community Relations* ($\mu = 2.4$). Data from the *Plus/Delta School Evaluation instrument* show that the comments in relation to those variables were equally distributed between the (+) and (Δ) categories. This neither confirms nor contradicts the findings of the *School Climate Survey*. The data from the *Plus/Delta School Evaluation instrument* indicated additional factors the staff categorized as (Δ) which aligned with the variable *Other*. Those factors included communication among the staff and better support for Special Education.

Data from the transcript of the focus group interview with staff from School Three appeared to confirm the findings of the *School Climate Survey* in addition to identifying additional factors they perceived as negative influences on students' academic achievement. Staff indicated the variables *Achievement Motivation*, *Order and Discipline*, and *Staff School/Parent/Community Relations* were all areas where the school needed to improve.

Through the focus group, several participants expressed having the perception that poverty in the surrounding community acutely influenced the *Areas for Improvement* at their school.

School Three – Participant Four

“We have to really work on motivating many of our new students because of the home environments they come from. It’s hard because so many students move in and out of our school.”

School Three – Participant One

“Because of the high rate of poverty in our area, we have a lot of transient students. This means that we constantly have to train new students and retrain students who leave and return to our school...This can make discipline challenging.”

School Three – Participant Three

“Our school also gets a large number of students with emotional disorders and self-contained Special Education students, because we have the only full-time specialist in the district. Most of our staff is not trained to work with these students. This can complicate discipline at times.”

Comments from the focus group session indicate *Staff School/Parent/Community Relations* was a variable the staff believed to be an *Area for Improvement*; however, this was primarily in regards to parental engagement.

School Three – Participant Two

“We have some parents who are very supportive, but many of our kids come from very challenging home environments.”

School Three – Participant One

“We conduct frequent home visits and our staff has a lot of eye opening experiences that show what many of our students are faced with at home.”

Through the focus group, several participants expressed a high level of positive engagement from community organizations. According to the group, those organizations provided wrap-around services that assisted the school in meeting the needs of the student population.

School Three – Participant Four

“Community organizations are very supportive of our school. They donate clothes, food, and many other services to students at our school.”

School Three – Participant Three

“Many of our students are involved in programs outside of school that provide positive support for our school. Our students really need the positive interaction outside of school.”

The staff reported additional details that aligned with the variable *Other*. Those details provided clarification of some of the factors they perceived as having a negative influence on academic achievement at their school. Staff reported that their school served a disproportionate number of self-contained Special Education students and students with emotional disorders as compared to other schools in the district.

School Three – Participant Two

“They [Special Education and students with emotional disorders] are assigned to our school from around the district because we have the only full-time specialist [for Special Education and emotional disorderly] in the district.”

The staff expressed the perception that the high proportion of Special Education and students with emotional disorders at the school negatively influenced their schools’ test scores.

School Three – Participant One

“We have a high number of those [Special Education and emotionally disorderly] students and it affects our [test] scores.”

Another concern that was expressed by the focus group related to *Equity and Fairness* at the district level.

School Three – Participant Three

“We are like the red-headed step child in our district. We do not receive the support we need [from the district] to work with the population of students that we serve.”

The staff reported having the perception that there were an inadequate number of staff members who were trained to work with Special Education and students with emotional disorders.

School Three – Participant Two

“The way our school is viewed in the district influences which students enroll at school. Despite this, I think we are one of the better schools in our district, especially for the kids we typically serve.”

School Three – Participant Three

“Most of our staff is not trained to work with these [student with emotional disorders and self-contained Special Education] students.”

4.4.4 Analysis of School Four Findings

Based on the findings of the School Climate Survey, two variables were initially identified as *Strengths* for School Four. Those variables were *Equity and Fairness* ($\mu = 4.5$) and *Staff Dedication to Student Learning* ($\mu = 4.6$). Data from the *Plus/Delta School Evaluation instrument* show that the majority of comments submitted that aligned with the variables *Equity and Fairness* and *Staff Dedication to Student Learning* are in the (+)

category. Data from the transcript of the focus group interview for School Four indicates that the staff had a positive perception of both variables that were initially identified as *Strengths*. The staff particularly expressed positive perceptions in regards to *Staff Dedication to Student Learning*.

School Four – Participant Two

“Our staff really puts a lot of effort into trying to provide the best educational experience we can for our students.”

The focus group also expressed positive perceptions of *Equity and Fairness* within their school.

School Four – Participant Four

“I think that it is important to our staff that students feel they are treated fairly by all of the adults in the building.”

Additional factors that emerged as *Strengths* based on the data from the transcript of the focus group interview are aligned with the variable *Other*. The staff reported having positive perceptions of the technology that students at the school had access to. Staff also reported that incentives such as field trips and college visits had a positive influence on the school environment and students’ levels of motivation.

Based on the findings of the School Climate Survey, four variables initially emerged as *Areas for Improvement* for School Four. Those variables were *Collaborative Decision-Making* ($\mu = 3.5$), *Order and Discipline* ($\mu = 3.2$), *Staff School/Parent/Community Relations* ($\mu = 3.1$), and *School Building* ($\mu = 3.3$). Data from the *Plus/Delta School Evaluation instrument* show that the majority of comments

submitted that aligned with those variables fit into the (Δ) category, particularly for the variables *Order and Discipline* (Δ) and *Staff School/Parent/Community Relations* (Δ).

The data from the *Plus/Delta School Evaluation instrument* indicate additional factors the staff perceived as *Areas for Improvement*, which aligned with the variable *Other*. Those factors included communication among the staff, communication with the administration, staff attitudes, and scheduling.

Data from the transcript of the focus group interview with staff from School Four appeared to confirm the findings of the School Climate Survey. Staff indicated that variables *Collaborative Decision-Making*, *Order and Discipline*, *Staff School/Parent/Community Relations*, and *School Building* were all areas where the school needed to improve. The focus group commented on each of those variables.

In relation to *Collaborative Decision-Making*, some of the focus group participants expressed the perception that the principal sometimes “plays the bad guy” when decisions were made. They indicated that the principal “playing the bad guy” when decisions were made sometimes produced tension with the principal and among the staff.

School Four – Participant Two

“Sometimes [the principal] has to play the bad guy when decisions are made and some of the teachers don’t like it.”

The staff also reported that *Order and Discipline* was often challenging at the school.

School Four – Participant One

“Maintaining discipline can sometimes be very challenging.”

School Four – Participant Two

“It [*Order and Discipline*] can be overwhelming sometimes with just one administrator in the building.”

The staff indicated that much of this difficulty was due to inadequate staffing; this issue is discussed at length later in this section. Comments from the focus group interview indicate *Staff School/Parent/Community Relations* was a variable the staff believed to be an *Area for Improvement*.

School Four – Participant One

“Parental engagement and community involvement at our school tends to fluctuate, we would love to have more parents and community members consistently involved with our school.”

School Four – Participant Two

“Many of our families are transient, so it really impacts parental support at our school.”

In addition to comments such as the previous one, the staff reported having partnerships with a number of community organizations and public officials they believed exerted a positive influence on their school.

School Four – Participant Four

“We have a lot of organizations that are involved with our school and they do a lot of good things for our students.”

Discussion related to the facilities produced a number of comments that indicated *School Building* was a variable the staff perceived as an *Area for Improvement*.

School Four – Participant Two

“The class[rooms] are really small and we have collapsible walls. This sometimes makes instruction difficult because there is limited space and

you can hear what is going on in the other classrooms... That can be distracting to them [students].”

The focus group also commented on the overall condition of the building.

School Four – Participant Two

“There are several areas of the building that really need to be updated.”

The staff also reported additional details that aligned with the variable *Other*.

Those details provided clarification of some of the factors they perceived as having a negative influence on academic achievement at their school. Staff reported that their school served a disproportionate number of ESOL students compared to other schools in the district.

School Four – Participant Three

“We need additional support to assist us with serving the high number of these [ESOL] students attending our school.”

Another issue that was identified during the focus group was the fact that this school did not have an assistant principal. The staff reported feeling like that the absence of an assistant principal contributed to a number of other issues at the school. The staff reported perceiving that variables such as *Order and Discipline* were negatively influenced by not having an assistant principal. The staff also reported feeling that other factors were negatively influenced by the absence of an assistant principal.

School Four – Participant Two

“Not having an assistant principal places everyone under a time crunch because many of us have to take on responsibilities that would normally be handled by an assistant principal.”

School Four – Participant One

“We are supposed to be able to hire a discipline coordinator soon. That should really help us with managing discipline. It can be overwhelming sometimes with just one administrator in the building.”

Through the focus group, several participants expressed that this “time crunch” created by staff having to take on multiple roles sometimes contributed to difficulties with scheduling and communication within the school.

School Four – Participant Three

“We [staff member] have to wear lots of hats here. It sometimes makes it seem like there is always a time crunch. I think it sometimes makes it hard to schedule things and stay in communication during the day because the staff is responsible for so many different things.”

4.5 Comparative Analysis of High-Achieving and Low-Achieving Schools

The results of the study revealed some differences in how staff at the high-achieving schools perceived many of the variables measured in this study as compared to staff from the low-achieving schools. A comparison of the data generated from the School Climate Survey demonstrates that point. There is a 15 percent difference in the average means generated by the high-achieving schools ($\mu_1 = 4.3$) as compared to those of the low-achieving schools ($\mu_2 = 3.8$). The average difference of means for all of the variables is $\mu_d = 0.6$. This indicates a difference in staff perceptions of school climate and culture between the high-achieving schools and low-achieving schools. Table 4.3.1.3 details the difference of Average Means (μ_d) for each category of school as measured using the data from the School Climate Survey.

Data generated using the *Plus/Delta School Evaluation instrument* support those findings. An examination of *Average Delta/Plus Index Scores* indicates a difference in perceptions as well. With possible scores ranging from +10 to -10, the high-achieving schools reported an *Average Delta/Plus Index Scores* of +4.5; whereas, the low-achieving schools reported an average score of -1. Results of that analysis are detailed in Table 4.3.2.2.

Based on the findings from the survey instruments and focus group interviews the researcher identified Strengths and Areas of Improvement for both school categories (e.g., high-achieving and low-achieving). The following sections describe how *Strengths*, *Areas for Improvement*, and *Areas of Differing Perception* were identified. Table 4.5.1 provides a graphic representation of the comparative analysis as described in this section.

Table 4.5.1 Identified Strengths, Areas of Improvement, and Areas of Differing Perception

School Category	Strengths	Areas for Improvement	Areas of Differing Perception
High-Achieving	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Equity and Fairness Staff Dedication to Student Learning School Building 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> School/Parent/Community Relations 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Achievement Motivation Order and Discipline School/Parent/Community Relations
Low-Achieving	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Equity and Fairness Staff Dedication to Student Learning 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Achievement Motivation Order and Discipline School/Parent/Community Relations 	

4.5.1 Comparison of Strengths

The findings of the *School Climate Survey* show that certain variables tended to generate higher mean scores from the participants when compared to the other variables. That trend was true for all of the schools that were involved in this study. For example,

the variable *Equity and Fairness* generated the highest mean score for all of the schools participating in this study. The variable *Staff Dedication to Student Learning* also tended to produce higher mean scores for each of the schools as compared to the other variables.

The average mean score for *Equity and Fairness* was $\mu = 4.8$ in the high-achieving schools and $\mu = 4.6$ in low-achieving schools. Results generated from the *Plus/Delta School Evaluation instrument* for *Equity and Fairness* differed between the high-achieving schools and low-achieving schools. The *Plus/Delta School Evaluation instrument* results for both high-achieving schools are categorized as (+). For both low-achieving schools, *Plus/Delta School Evaluation instrument* results are categorized as (Ø). The data from the focus group interviews indicate that staff at both the high-achieving and low-achieving schools had positive perceptions of *Equity and Fairness* within their school buildings. Comments from the focus group interviews provide some insight into differences in how staff at the low-achieving schools perceived *Equity and Fairness* on the district level as compared to staff at the high-achieving school. Staff at the low-achieving schools made a number of comments indicating they perceived their school received inadequate support from the district to assist them in meeting the needs of their student population. There were no such comments from the high-achieving schools during the focus group interview.

Staff Dedication to Student Learning was the other factor in the School Climate Survey results with a high average mean score in comparison to the other variables. The mean score for that factor was $\mu = 4.7$ in the high-achieving schools and $\mu = 4.5$ in the low-achieving schools. The findings of the *Plus/Delta School Evaluation instrument*

show all four schools participating in the study generated results that categorized *Staff Dedication to Student Learning* as (+). Data from the focus group interviews also indicate that staff at all of the schools had positive perceptions of *Staff Dedication to Student Learning* within their buildings.

4.5.2 Comparison of Areas for Improvement

The findings of the School Climate Survey show that certain variables tended to generate lower mean scores from the participants when compared to the other variables. That trend was true for all of the schools that were involved in this study. For example, the variable *School/Parent/Community Relations* generated the lowest mean score for all of the schools participating in this study. The variable *Order and Discipline* also tended to produce lower mean scores for all of the participating schools when compared to the other variables.

The average mean score for *School/Parent/Community Relations* was $\mu = 3.3$ in the high-achieving schools and $\mu = 2.8$ in low-achieving schools. Results generated from the *Plus/Delta School Evaluation* instrument for *School/Parent/Community Relations* were mixed. Examining the high-achieving schools, for School One that variable was categorized as (Δ) and for School Two (+). For the low-achieving schools, *School/Parent/Community Relations* was categorized as (\emptyset) for School Three and (+) for School Four. The data from the focus group interviews indicate that parental involvement was an area staff at all of the schools perceived as needing improvement. Comments from the focus group interviews provide some insight into differences in how staff at the high-

achieving schools perceived low parental engagement levels as compared to staff at the low-achieving school. Staff at the high-achieving schools tended to make comments attributing the lack of parental engagement to factors such as work schedules, transportation, or language barriers; whereas staff at the low achieving schools tended to make comments that attributed low parental engagement to unstable home environments. Data from the focus group interviews also show that all of the schools reported making multiple and varied efforts to reach out to parents and the surrounding community to involve them in school activities. An additional finding from the focus group interview transcript data was that all of the participating schools reported perceiving that there was a high level of positive support from local community organizations.

Another variable in the School Climate Survey results with a low average mean score in comparison to the other variables was *Order and Discipline*. The mean score for that factor was a $\mu = 4.0$ in the high-achieving schools and $\mu = 2.9$ in the low-achieving schools. The findings of the *Plus/Delta School Evaluation instrument* show that three of the four schools participating in the study generated results that categorized *Order and Discipline* as (\emptyset). The *Plus/Delta School Evaluation instrument* results from School 4 categorized that variable as (Δ). The data obtained using the survey instruments also indicate that behaviors such as fighting and disrespect towards the staff were perceived as occurring more frequently in the low-achieving schools. Those data are supported by the responses to survey items that specifically address fighting and disrespect towards staff on the School Climate Survey:

Item 3 (Reverse Scored): “Students here fight a lot”

(High-achieving schools, $\mu = 4.8$; Low-achieving schools, $\mu = 2.4$)

Item 9(Reverse Scored): “Teachers are disrespected by students.”

(High-achieving schools, $\mu = 4.3$; Low-achieving schools, $\mu = 2.8$)

Data from the focus group interviews also indicate that staff at the high-achieving schools tended to have more positive perceptions of *Order and Discipline* within their schools than staff at the low achieving schools.

4.5.3 Areas of Differing Perception

The findings of the School Climate Survey show that for certain variables the high and low-achieving schools generated higher differences in the average mean (μ_d). Any variables with $\mu_d \geq 1$ were identified as *Areas of Differing Perception*. Based on that criteria, the variables *Achievement Motivation* ($\mu_d = 1.2$), *Order & Discipline* ($\mu_d = 1.1$), and *School Building* ($\mu_d = 1.1$) were identified as *Areas of Differing Perception* between the high and low-achieving schools. Table 4.4.1.3 contains the μ_d for all of the variables measured by the *Comer School Climate Survey*.

The variable that showed the largest μ_d for the School Climate Survey results was *Achievement Motivation*. The average mean score (μ) for the School Climate Survey in *Achievement Motivation* was $\mu = 4.5$ in the high-achieving schools and $\mu = 3.3$ in the low-achieving schools. Results from the School Climate Survey show that three of the four schools’ responses to this variable were categorized as (\emptyset). School One was the only school that categorized that variable as (+). The findings of the focus group interviews

indicated that staff at the high-achieving schools typically had a more positive perception of *Achievement Motivation* at their schools than staff at the low-achieving schools.

As outlined in the previous section, the μ for the School Climate Survey in *Order and Discipline* was $\mu = 4.0$ in the high-achieving schools and $\mu = 2.9$ in the low-achieving schools. Results from the School Climate Survey show that three of the four schools' responses to this variable were categorized as (\emptyset). School One was the only school that categorized that variable as (+). The findings of the focus group interviews indicated that staff at the high-achieving schools typically had a more positive perception of *Order and Discipline* at their schools than staff at the low-achieving schools.

The average mean score for the School Climate Survey in *School Building* was $\mu = 4.8$ in the high-achieving schools and $\mu = 3.7$ in the low-achieving schools. Results from the School Climate Survey show that three of the four schools' responses to this variable were categorized as (\emptyset). The School Climate Survey results from School Three categorized that variable as (Δ). The findings of the focus group interviews indicate that staff at the high-achieving schools typically had a more positive perception of *School Building* at their schools than staff at the low-achieving schools.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Overview of the Study

In this multi-case study the researcher explored the specific challenges faced by four rural/town South Carolina elementary schools as perceived by the faculty, staff, and administration at those schools. The researcher examined how those perceived challenges were addressed in each school. The results of this study do not represent a generalization of all schools in South Carolina with similar demographic make-ups. Rather than provide generalizable data, the results of this study provide a detailed analysis of the school climate, *Strengths*, and *Areas for Improvement* as perceived by the faculty, staff, and administration at the schools that participated in this study.

The participating schools were selected from rural/town areas of South Carolina based on geographic location, demographic data, and state reported school ratings. The researcher evaluated the schools chosen for this study to ensure that demographic data in terms of proportions of racial/ethnic minority students and poverty levels were similar. The student populations for all of the schools included in the study were predominantly low-income students and students of color.

The sample population for this study was recruited from the faculty, staff, and administration of the participating schools. For this study the term staff refers to any adults who consistently worked with students at the school. The same group of participants from each school completed both the *Plus/Delta School Evaluation* and the

Comer School Climate Survey. After a preliminary analysis of the data from both instruments the principal in each school, with guidance from the researcher, selected a smaller sample population to participate in semi-structured focus group interviews. The findings of the semi-structured focus group interviews were used to inform the data received from the survey instruments, specifically for confirmation and clarification of the findings. Results from the survey instruments along with the semi-structured focus group sessions were aligned using the nine variables taken from the Comer School Development Model (CSDM) along with a tenth variable, *Other*, which was included to capture comments that did not align with any of the variables included in the CSDM. Table 5.1.1 includes the list of those variables along with a definition of each variable.

Table 5.1.1 *Comer School Climate Survey* Variable Definitions

Variable	Definition
Achievement Motivation	The extent to which students at the school believe that they can learn and are willing to learn.
Collaborative Decision-Making	The involvement of parents, students, and staff in the decisions affecting the school.
Equity and Fairness	The equal treatment of students regardless of ethnicity or gender.
Leadership	The principal's role in guiding the direction of the school and in creating a positive climate.
Order and Discipline	Appropriateness of student behavior in the school setting.
School Building	The appearance of the school building.

School/Parent/Community Relations	The support and involvement of parents and the community in the life of the school.
Staff Dedication to Student Learning	The effort of teachers to get students to learn.
Staff Expectations	The expectations of staff members that students will do well academically and will lead a successful life.
Other	Captured any comments that did not align with the nine variables taken from the Comer School Development Model.

5.1.1 Research Question One

What challenges to students' academic performance were identified by the staff?

In the findings that emerged from the survey instrument data, the staff from the participating schools identified a number of factors they perceived as challenges to students' academic achievement. For this study, the researcher identified factors that challenged students' academic achievement by cross referencing the mean scores (μ) those schools generated on the *School Climate Survey* with the data that was reported using the *Plus/Delta School Evaluation instrument*. The data obtained by the *School Climate Survey* show that the variables *School/Parent/Community Relations* and *Order and Discipline* consistently had the lowest μ for all of the schools that participated in this study. For the low-achieving schools, the variable *School Building* also reported a low mean score on the *School Climate Survey* as compared to the other variables. Those were the factors identified the most as challenges.

Although the variable *School/Parent/Community Relations* generated the lowest μ on the *School Climate Survey*, data from the *Plus/Delta School Evaluation instrument* show that staff typically reported comments that fit into the *Plus (+)* category for that variable. Those comments typically focused on the number and variety of efforts the schools were making to engage parents and the community in a positive manner. Further probing during the focus group interviews provided some insight into the apparent discrepancy between the findings of the survey instruments. Whereas participants reported that their schools did a good job of reaching out to parents and to the community to promote positive engagement; they also reported that levels of parental engagement were lower than desired, particularly in the low-achieving schools.

For the variable *Order and Discipline* the findings of the *Plus/Delta School Evaluation instrument*, presented in Table 4.4.2.1, show that the high-achieving schools submitted no comments that align with this variable; whereas the low-achieving schools reported a substantial number of comments that align with that variable. Additionally, comments submitted by the low-achieving schools that align with the variable *Order and Discipline* tended to be in the *Delta (Δ)* category. The data from the focus group interviews provided some clarification of the results generated from the survey instruments. Focus group participants at the high-achieving schools tended to report disruptions in behavior as being relatively few and mild in nature (i.e., talking in the hallway, failing to clean-up after eating lunch, etc.) Focus group participants at the low-achieving schools tended to report disruptions in behavior as occurring somewhat frequently and being serious in nature (e.g., fighting, disrespect towards staff, etc.). Those

data are supported by the responses to *School Climate Survey* items that specifically address fighting and disrespect towards staff:

Item 3 (Reverse Scored): “Students here fight a lot.”

(High-achieving schools, $\mu = 4.8$; Low-achieving schools, $\mu = 2.4$)

Item 9 (Reverse Scored): “Teachers are disrespected by students.”

(High-achieving schools, $\mu = 4.3$; Low-achieving schools, $\mu = 2.8$)

Additional data from the focus group interviews provided insight into why staff at the low-achieving schools perceived serious discipline issues as being somewhat frequent at their schools.

Focus group participants from School Three reported that students with emotional disorders and specific learning disabilities were concentrated at their school. The participants reported that this was due to their school employing the only specialist for such students in the district. They indicated having the perception that this contributed to the level of serious discipline issues in their school. The focus group from School Four reported that their school did not have an assistant principal. That focus group indicated that the absence of a second administrator, in their perception, had an adverse influence on *Order and Discipline* within their school. Another finding that emerged from the focus-group interview data and informed the results of the survey instruments was that both of the low-achieving schools reported having a high proportion of transient students. Participants from those schools indicated that the high proportion of transient students negatively influenced *Order and Discipline* as well as the academic achievement of students at their schools.

Data from the *Plus/Delta School Evaluation instrument* shows the variable *Other* solicited the greatest number of comments in the (Δ) category for all of the participating schools. For the high-achieving schools, those comments typically related two factors such as tardies & absences and teachers having additional non-academic responsibilities (i.e., being responsible for money taken up during fundraisers). The comments reported by the low-achieving schools as (Δ) for the variable *Other* typically focused on: communication among the staff; inadequate staffing & support for Special Education; relationships among staff members; and scheduling.

5.1.2 Research Question Two

How did study participants characterize their schools' strengths and areas for improvement and/or change?

The researcher identified *Strengths* and *Areas for Improvement* as perceived by the staff at each of the participating schools by cross referencing data from the *School Climate Survey* with data taken from the results of the *Plus/Delta School Evaluation instrument* and transcripts of the semi-structured focus group interviews. *Strengths* and *Areas for Improvement* were initially identified using data generated by the *School Climate Survey*. For the *School Climate Survey*, schools reported scores on a five-point Likert scale, where 5 is the positive correlate. *Strengths* for each school were initially identified by isolating variables that generated a mean score $\mu \geq 4.5$ on the *School Climate Survey*. *Areas for Improvement* were initially identified for each school by isolating variables that generated a $\mu \leq 3.5$. If no $\mu \leq 3.5$ for a school; *Areas for*

Improvement were identified by isolating the two variables that generated the lowest value for μ on the *School Climate Survey* for that school. This data is displayed in Chapter IV, Table 4.4.1.1. The following sections provide a summary of the findings from each school and a detailed explanation of how participants at each school characterize the *Strengths* and *Areas for Improvement* at their school.

5.1.2.1 School One Summary

Five variables initially emerged as *Strengths* for School One. Those variables were *Achievement Motivation* ($\mu = 4.5$), *Equity and Fairness* ($\mu = 4.8$), *Leadership* ($\mu = 4.5$), *School Building* ($\mu = 4.9$), and *Staff Dedication to Student Learning* ($\mu = 4.7$). In addition, the data from *Plus/Delta School Evaluation instrument* show all of the variables were categorized as (+), except for *School Building* (\emptyset). No comments were reported in the data from the *Plus/Delta School Evaluation instrument* regarding that variable. Data from the focus group interview for this school supported all five variables as *Strengths*. Two variables initially emerged as *Areas for Improvement* for School One. Those variables were *Staff Expectations* ($\mu = 4.1$) and *Staff School/Parent/Community Relations* ($\mu = 2.9$). Data from the *Plus/Delta School Evaluation instrument* supported *Staff School/Parent/Community Relations* (Δ) as being an *Area for Improvement*; whereas *Plus/Delta School Evaluation instrument data* did not support *Staff Expectations* (+).

Comments in regards to *Staff School/Parent/Community Relations* provided some additional insights into how the staff perceived this variable. Comments from the focus

group indicate distinctions between their views of parental engagement at the school and the level of involvement parents had with their children.

School One – Participant Three

“We don’t look down on our parents...Our parents work hard...They sacrifice to support their children...It costs many of them money to take time away from work to attend school events such as parent-teacher conferences.”

School One – Participant Four

“A lack of presence does not mean a lack of involvement with them [their children]...They want to know what their children are doing.”

The staff also reported having positive perceptions of the support they received from local community organizations.

“We receive a lot of support from local community organizations.”

Data taken from the transcript of the focus group interview do not support *Staff Expectations* as an *Area for Improvement*.

School One – Participant Five

“We set high expectations for everything we do here...The students understand, this is the way we do things at [School One] and they rise to our expectations.”

School One – Participant Four

“The reason why our students achieve [academically] is that we set high standards for them and they rise to meet them.”

An additional factor that emerged as an *Area for Improvement* based the transcript of the focus group interview aligned with the variable *Other*. Staff reported feeling that

they needed to have more support for English as a Second or Other Language (ESOL) students.

5.1.2.2 School Two Summary

Three variables initially emerged as *Strengths* for School Two. Those variables were *Equity and Fairness* ($\mu = 4.8$), *School Building* ($\mu = 4.7$), and *Staff Dedication to Student Learning* ($\mu = 4.6$). In addition, the data from *Plus/Delta School Evaluation instrument* show all of the variables were categorized as (+), except for *School Building* (\emptyset). No comments were reported in the data from the *Plus/Delta School Evaluation instrument* regarding that variable. Data from the focus group interview for this school supported all three variables as *Strengths*.

Two variables initially emerged as *Areas for Improvement* for School Two. Those variables were *Order & Discipline* ($\mu = 3.7$) and *Staff School/Parent/Community Relations* ($\mu = 3.6$). Data from the *Plus/Delta School Evaluation instrument* did not support either of these variables as *Areas for Improvement*. *Order & Discipline* was categorized as (\emptyset) and *Staff School/Parent/Community Relations* as (+).

Comments in regards to *Staff School/Parent/Community Relations* provided some additional insights regarding how the staff perceived the factors that comprised this variable. Comments from the focus group indicate how staff at School Two perceived parental engagement at their school.

School Two – Participant Two

“Many of our parents drive long distances to work...It’s hard for them to consistently participate in school activities.”

“Most of our parents support our school when they can.”

The staff particularly reported having positive perceptions of the support they received from the local community.

School Two – Participant Two

“The school and our community are interwoven...People support our staff because we live in the community. We attend the same churches and teachers coach little league teams....Parents trust us with their children because they know us.”

Data taken from the transcript of the focus group interview do not support *Order & Discipline* as an *Area for Improvement*.

School Two – Participant Two

“We work very hard to make sure that behavior does not disrupt instruction at our school...The behavior issues we typically deal with are small. Things like talking in the hallway...We very rarely have serious behavior disruptions.”

School Two – Participant One

“We keep students actively engaged in academic activities from the time they enter our school, this minimizes behavior issues at our school.”

Additional factors that emerged as *Areas for Improvement* based on the data from the *Plus/Delta School Evaluation instrument* and the transcript of the focus group interview aligned with the variable *Other*. Based on the findings of the *Plus/Delta School Evaluation instrument* two factors emerged, tardies and absences and teachers having additional non-academic responsibilities. Staff reported that finding ways to decrease the number of student tardies and absences was an *Area for Improvement* in their school.

Comments were also submitted in regards to teachers having none academic responsibilities such as collecting and counting money from fundraisers.

5.1.2.3 School Three Summary

Two variables initially emerged as *Strengths* for School Three. Those variables were *Equity and Fairness* ($\mu = 4.6$) and *Leadership* ($\mu = 4.5$). In addition, the data from *Plus/Delta School Evaluation instrument* show *Leadership* was categorized as (+). *Equity and Fairness* was categorized as (Ø). No comments were reported in the data from the *Plus/Delta School Evaluation instrument* regarding that variable. Data from the focus group interview for this school supported both variables as *Strengths*.

School Three – Participant Three

“Our principal is very supportive. [The principal] is one of the reasons I enjoy working here... [The principal] makes it feel like a family.”

School Three – Participant One

“We [the staff] emphasize treating every student like they are someone, regardless of their background.”

Three variables initially emerged as *Areas for Improvement* for School Three. Those variables were *Achievement Motivation* ($\mu = 2.9$), *Order and Discipline* ($\mu = 2.5$), and *Staff School/Parent/Community Relations* ($\mu = 2.4$). Data from the *Plus/Delta School Evaluation instrument* did not support *Achievement Motivation* (Ø) as *Area for Improvement*; no comments were submitted for that variable. The findings of the *Plus/Delta School Evaluation instrument* were inconclusive for *Order & Discipline* (Ø)

and *Staff School/Parent/Community Relations* (Ø). Although a number of comments were submitted for each of those variables, they were equally divided between the (+) and (Δ) categories.

Comments in regards to *Achievement Motivation* provided some additional insights in to how the staff perceived this variable.

School Three – Participant Four

“We have to really work on motivating many of our new students because of the home environments they come from. It’s hard because so many students move in and out of our school.”

Data taken from the transcript of the focus group interview for School Three support *Order & Discipline* as an *Area for Improvement*.

School Three – Participant One

“Because of the high rate of poverty in our area, we have a lot of transient students. This means that we constantly have to train new students and retrain students who leave and return to our school...This can make discipline challenging.”

School Three – Participant Three

“Our school also gets a large number of students with emotional disorders and self-contained special education students, because we have the only full-time specialist in the district. Most of our staff is not trained to work with these students. This can complicate discipline at times.”

Comments in regards to *Staff School/Parent/Community Relations* provided some additional insights into how the staff perceived this variable.

School Three – Participant Two

“We have some parents who are very supportive, but many of our kids come from very challenging home environments.”

The staff particularly had positive perceptions of the support they received from the local community organizations.

School Three – Participant Four

“Community organizations are very supportive of our school. They donate clothes, food, and many other services to students at our school.”

The staff reported additional details in the *Plus/Delta School Evaluation instrument* and during the focus group session that aligned with the variable *Other*. Those details provided clarification of some of the factors they perceived as having a negative influence on academic achievement at their school.

School Three – Participant One

“We have a high number of those [Special Education and emotionally disorderly] students and it affects our [test] scores.”

Another concern that was expressed by the focus group related to *Equity and Fairness* at the district level.

School Three – Participant Three

“We are like the red-headed step child in our district. We do not receive the support we need [from the district] to work with the population of students that we serve.”

The staff reported having the perception that that there were an inadequate number of staff members who were trained to work in Special Education and with students who have emotional disorders.

5.1.2.4 School Four Summary

Two variables initially emerged as *Strengths* for School Four. Those variables were *Equity and Fairness* ($\mu = 4.5$) and *Staff Dedication to Student Learning* ($\mu = 4.6$). Data from *Plus/Delta School Evaluation instrument* show *Staff Dedication to Student Learning* was categorized as (+). *Equity and Fairness* was categorized as (\emptyset). No comments were reported in the data from the *Plus/Delta School Evaluation instrument* regarding that variable. Data from the focus group interview for this school supported both variables as *Strengths*.

School Four – Participant Two

“Our staff really puts a lot of effort into trying to provide the best educational experience we can for our students.”

School Four – Participant Four

“I think that it is important to our staff that students feel they are treated fairly by all of the adults in the building.”

Four variables initially emerged as *Areas for Improvement* for School Four. Those variables were *Collaborative Decision-Making* ($\mu = 3.5$), *Order and Discipline* ($\mu = 3.2$), *Staff School/Parent/Community Relations* ($\mu = 3.1$), and *School Building* ($\mu = 3.3$). Data from the *Plus/Delta School Evaluation instrument* support *Collaborative Decision-Making* (Δ), *Order and Discipline* (Δ) as *Areas for Improvement*. The findings of the *Plus/Delta School Evaluation instrument* did not support *Staff School/Parent/Community Relations* (+) as an *Area for Improvement*. No comments were submitted regarding the variable *School Building* (\emptyset).

Comments in regards to *Collaborative Decision-Making* provided some additional insights in to how the staff perceived this variable. These insights contradict findings from the survey instruments.

School Four – Participant Two

“Sometimes [the principal] has to play the bad guy when decisions are made and some of the teachers don’t like it.”

Data taken collected from the transcript of the focus group interview at School Four support *Order & Discipline* as an *Area for Improvement*.

School Four – Participant One

“Maintaining discipline can sometimes be very challenging.”

School Four – Participant Two

“It [*Order and Discipline*] can be overwhelming sometimes with just one administrator in the building.”

Comments in regards to *Staff School/Parent/Community Relations* provided some additional insights in to how the staff perceived this variable.

School Four – Participant One

“Parental engagement and community involvement at our school tends to fluctuate, we would love to have more parents and community members consistently involved with our school.”

The staff reported having positive perceptions of the support they received from the local community organizations.

School Four – Participant Four

“We have a lot of organizations that are involved with our school and they do a lot of good things for our students.”

Discussion related to the facilities indicated *School Building* was a variable the staff perceived as an *Area for Improvement*.

School Four – Participant Two

“The class[rooms] are really small and we have collapsible walls. This sometimes makes instruction difficult because there is limited space and you can hear what is going on in the other classrooms...That can be distracting to them [students].”

The focus group also commented on the overall condition of the building.

School Four – Participant Two

“There are several areas of the building that really need to be updated.”

The staff also reported additional details that aligned with the variable *Other*. Staff reported that their school served a disproportionate number of ESOL students compared to other schools in the district. They indicated they did not feel there was adequate staffing to support those students. Another issue that was identified during the focus group was not having an assistant principal. The staff reported perceiving that the variable *Order and Discipline* was negatively influenced by not having an assistant principal.

5.1.3 Research Question Three

How do the results compare for the schools that participated in this study?

The results of the study revealed some differences in how staff at the high-achieving schools perceived many of the variables measured in this study as compared to staff from the low-achieving schools. A comparison of the data generated from the

School Climate Survey demonstrates that point. The average difference of means (μ_d) for all of the variables measured by the *School Climate Survey* is $\mu_d = 0.6$. This indicates that staff at the high-achieving schools perceived school climate and culture at their schools as being more positive than staff at the low-achieving schools.

The data generated by the *Plus/Delta School Evaluation instrument* shows that high-achieving schools reported an *Average Plus/Delta Index Score* of +4.5; whereas, the low-achieving schools reported an average score of -1. The difference in scores represents a difference in the perceptions of the staff members of the two categories of schools. That finding supports the findings of the *School Climate Survey*. This indicates staff at the high-achieving schools was more likely to characterize their school in a positive manner. The difference in *Average Plus/Delta Index Score* supports the data collected using the *Comer School Climate Survey*.

Furthermore, findings that emerged from the focus group interviews provided clarification of the results of the survey instrument data that lend further support to the initial findings. Additionally, the findings of the focus group interviews provide insight into why the staff at each of the participating schools submitted the responses to the survey instruments that are contained in those data sets.

5.2 Situating Findings in Extant Literature

The discussion of the research literature in Chapter II identified a pattern of key factors associated with high levels of academic achievement for ethnic minorities and

students living in poverty. A few of those factors closely aligned with the findings of this study:

- (a) Establishing a positive school climate and culture where students feel safe and are held to high standards and expectations by all of the adults working in the building (Comer, 2001; Berliner, 2006; Howard, 2013; Dudley-Marling, & Lucas, 2009; Jones & Nichols, 2013; Ford & Moore, 2013; Delpit, 2012)
- (b) Bridging educational opportunity gaps that exist for children living in poverty (Bomer et al., 2008; Darling-Hammond, 2004; Ford & Grantham, 2003; Howard, 2013; Jackson & Moore, 2006; Toldson, 2014; Ladson-Billings, 2006).
- (c) Incorporating a linear combination of good policy decisions that adjust academic school and procedures strategies to meet the needs of diverse learners (Darling-Hammond, 2010, pp 27-62, pp 99-120; Comer & Emmons, 2006; Jones & Nichols, 2013; Howard, 2013; Dobbie & Fryer, 2011; Edmonds, 1979; Reeves, 2000, pp. 207-208; Toldson, Brown, & Sutton, 2009)

Findings from the data generated by the survey instruments support the research literature as outlined below:

1. The average mean scores (μ) generated by the *School Climate Survey* indicate that staff at the high-achieving schools had more positive perceptions of the climate and culture within their schools than staff at the low-achieving schools. The μ generated on the *School Climate Survey* is higher for the high-achieving schools ($\mu = 4.3$) than the low-achieving schools ($\mu = 3.8$). This produces a

difference in mean scores ($\mu_d = .6$). That pattern is consistent for all nine of the variables measured by the *School Climate Survey*.

2. Plus/Delta Index Scores generated using the *Plus/Delta School Evaluation instrument* indicate that staff at the high-achieving schools had more positive perceptions of the climate and culture within their schools than staff at the low-achieving schools. The maximum *Plus/Delta Index Score* was +10. The minimum *Plus/Delta Index Score* was -10. The high-achieving schools generated an average *Plus/Delta Index Score* of +4.5. The low-achieving schools generated a score of -1. The *Plus/Delta School Evaluation instrument data* show that for seven of the ten variables (*Achievement Motivation, Collaborative Decision-Making, Equity & Fairness, Order & Discipline, School Building, Staff Expectations, and Other*) the high-achieving schools generated higher point totals than the low-achieving schools. The high-achieving and low-achieving schools generated the same point totals for two of the variables (*Leadership and Staff Dedication to Student Learning*). The low-achieving schools generated a higher point total for one variable (*School/Parent/Community Relations*). Those data are detailed in Table 4.4.2.2.

Data from transcripts of the semi-structured focus group interviews provide additional insights and clarification of the results generated by the survey instruments. For instance, a common finding among all of the schools was the dedication of staff to establishing positive relationships with students and providing the best educational experience possible. Staff at all of the schools reported having the perception that staff

members at their school were highly dedicated to helping students learn. Staff at all of the participating schools also reported that staff at their school set high expectations for students and treated students fairly irrespective of factors such as race, gender, socioeconomic status, etc.

Areas where staff comments appeared to diverge when comparing the high-achieving schools and low-achieving schools related to student behavior, parental engagement, and facilities. Staff at the high-achieving schools reported that behavior issues at their schools tended to be minimal; whereas, staff at the low-achieving schools reported regularly dealing with serious behavior issues. The staff at School Three attributed some of the issues with discipline to the high proportion of students with emotional disorders and self-contained Special Education students attending their school. There are also key differences in how staff at the high-achieving schools and low-achieving schools reported perceiving parental engagement levels at their schools. Staff at the high-achieving schools tended to attribute low parental engagement levels as a result of factors such as inflexible work schedules, lack of transportation, or language barriers. They also reported having the perception that although many parents were not present in the school; those parents were otherwise highly engaged with their children. Although staff at the low-achieving schools also reported the same factors as contributing to low levels of parental engagement, the staff at the low-achieving schools also reported issues related to unstable home environments as contributing factors to the low levels of parental engagement at their schools. All of the participating schools reported having positive perceptions of the support they received from community organizations. In

regards to facilities, the high-achieving schools reported having a high level of satisfaction with facilities at their schools. In comparison, staff at the low-achieving schools tended to have less favorable perceptions of the facilities at their schools. Staff at School Four commented on issues with the design and layout of the school building that they believed interfered with instruction at their school.

Additionally, some data obtained from the transcripts of the focus group interviews did not align with the variables that served as the framework for this study; however, those data support the research literature, as discussed in Chapter II. For example:

School One – Participant Five

“We set high expectations for everything we do here...The students understand, this is the way we do things at [School One] and they rise to our expectations.”

School One – Participant Six

“Our school is driven by the high expectations every adult has for our children.”

Data from the focus group interviews at the low-achieving schools provide additional insight into potential differences between the perceptions of staff at those schools as compared to the staff at the high-achieving schools. The staff at the low-achieving schools made a number of comments in regards to factor the staff possessed limited influence over. For School Three, staff reported perceiving that staffing shortages in Special Education had a negative influence on academic achievement and discipline at

their school. For School Four, staff reported that the absence of an assistant administrator and a shortage of support for ESOL students negatively influenced discipline and academic achievement at their school. Furthermore, staff at those schools reported having the perception that their school did not receive adequate support from their schools' district. Staff at both low-achieving schools also indicated having the perception that their schools did not receive equitable treatment in comparison to other schools in their district.

Focus groups at all of the schools made comments that related to bridging opportunity gaps; however, there were differences in what services those groups reported their schools offered. All of the schools reported providing students with material assistance such as clothing and food. Each school also reported assisting students with support for attending enrichment activities such as field trips. The difference arose in the offerings they reported in regards to academic enrichment programs. The high-achieving schools reported offering free tutoring conducted by the schools' staffs for all students before and after schools; whereas the low-achieving schools reported student engagement in programs sponsored by local community organizations. There was no indication that those programs were staffed by teachers from those schools.

5.3 Discussion and Implications

The findings of this study indicate that staff at all of the participating schools, irrespective of their academic-achievement level, viewed positive relationships with students as central to achieving success with educating the students they worked with.

That notion is supported by similarities in study results for the variables *Staff Dedication to Student Learning*, *Staff Expectations*, and *Equity and Fairness* among all of the participating schools. Those findings indicate that staff at all of the participating schools possessed similar perceptions of how dedicated staff at their respective schools were to: working towards students' academic success; setting high expectations for students; and treating students equitably and fairly. Despite the schools exhibiting similar perceptions in regards to the aforementioned variables, divergence in relation to the variables, *Achievement Motivation*, *Order and Discipline*, and *School/ Parent/ Community Relations* suggests that distinct differences exist in the dispositions of the staff at the high-achieving schools as compared to the staff at the low-achieving schools. Extant research suggests avoiding deficit ideology, contributes to the effectiveness of staff at those schools (Fryer & Dobbie, 2012; Delpit, 2012; Howard, 2013). As discussed in Chapter II, educators who assume deficits exist with certain student populations may possess biases in regards to those students. Many researchers assert that biases, whether conscious or unconscious, may have a considerable influence on how educators interact with students (Howard, 2013; Moore & Flowers, 2011; Gorski, 2008). The findings of this study suggest that staff at the low-achieving schools

Based on the findings of this study, key differences arose between the high-achieving schools and low-achieving schools in regards to the variables *Achievement Motivation*, *Order & Discipline*, and *School Building*. Those data indicate, in comparison to their counter-parts at the low-achieving schools, staff at the high-achieving schools tended to have a more positive perception of: students' motivation to achieve

academically; order and discipline inside of their schools; and the condition of their schools' facilities. Moreover, based on the research literature, as discussed in Chapter II, the areas of divergence in this study appear to be factors that research indicates can be effectively addressed by implementing the right mix of culture building strategies and policy decisions (Fryer & Dobbie, 2011; Darling-Hammond, 2010, pp 27-62, pp 99-120; Comer & Emmons, 2006; Jones & Nichols, 2013). The areas of divergence in this study also indicate a difference in teacher dispositions between the staff at the high and low-achieving schools. Dispositions influence the meaning that individuals assign to their surrounding and experiences (Delpit, 2012). Howard (2013) asserted that the disposition of educators has an important role in how they interact with students and the expectations they set for students. Moreover, Moore & Flowers (2012) found that educators' dispositions and level of expectations had a direct impact on the motivation of students of color to achieve academically. Existing research suggests that it is important for educators to be aware of their disposition and biases so that can ensure that the classroom culture is inclusive and supports diverse learners (Howard, 2013; Delpit, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2006).

Another finding from this study that arose from analysis of the transcripts of the focus group interviews was a difference in how staff at the high-achieving schools tended to perceive low levels of parental engagement when compared to staff at the low-achieving schools. As previously mentioned, staff at the high-achieving schools tended to attribute low parental engagement levels to factors such as inflexible work schedules, lack of transportation, or language barriers. They also reported having the perception that

although many parents were not present in the school those parents were otherwise highly engaged with their children. In comparison, staff at the low-achieving schools reported factors associated with unstable home environments as contributing factors to the low levels of parental engagement at their schools. Many researchers have found that educators in many cases have negative dispositions towards the home environments of students of color and those living in poverty that are not grounded in empirical data (Delpit, 2012; Howard, 2013; Toldson, 2008). Biases towards particular student groups may result in educators interpreting interactions involving students belonging to these groups differently than they would otherwise interpret them (Howard, 2013). For students of color and the poor, the biases they encounter are generally negative in nature and may also have negative influences on students' sense of belonging and self-efficacy (Moore & Flowers, 2012; Delpit, 2012; Comer & Emmons, 2006). Such perceptions of their environment in turn have negative influences on students' levels of motivation and academic achievement efficacy (Moore & Flowers, 2012; Toldson, 2008; Delpit, 2012).

The findings of this study also indicate a difference exists in how staffs at the high and low-achieving schools perceived equity within their school districts. Staff at the low-achieving schools tended to report perceiving that their schools did not receive equitable treatment from their school districts. The findings of this study imply that the perception of inequitable treatment at the district level arose from factors including the condition of school facilities and perceived staffing shortages. Extant research suggests that staffs at high-achieving schools with student populations composed primarily of students of color and the poor tend to place little emphasis on factor that are outside of their control. Staffs

at such schools tend to place more emphasis on influencing factors that are under their direct influence and mitigating the negative influences of factors that are beyond their control (Jones & Nichols, 2013, Darling-Hammond, 2010; Fryer & Dobbie, 2011).

5.4 Recommendations

“No significant learning occurs without a significant relationship” (Comer, 2001). The power and importance of establishing significant relationships with students was a recurring theme among all of the schools that participated in this study. That is also an essential element of the Comer School Development Model, which served as the framework for this study (Comer & Emmons, 2006). The research literature, as discussed in Chapter II, suggests that students’ academic achievement is most positively influenced when the power of significant relationships among school staff and students is combined with the right mix of strategies and good policy decisions (Darling-Hammond, 2010, pp 27-62, pp 99-120; Comer & Emmons, 2006; Jones & Nichols, 2013; Comer & Emmons, 2006; Reeves, 2000; Howard, 2013; Dobbie & Fryer, 2011). The findings of this study appear to support that concept.

5.4.1 Recommendations for Faculty and Staff

The powerful influence of relationships among staff and students is evident in the findings of this study. The power and influence of relationships is widely supported by the research literature (Comer, 2001; Comer & Emmons, 2006; Ford & Moore, 2013; Dobbie & Fryer, 2011). Establishing a positive classroom culture by harnessing the

power of significant relationships can have a positive influence on students' academic achievement. In addition, it is important that teachers make sure that their interactions with students are positive and to the extent possible not influenced by preconceptions about students related to factors such as race or socioeconomic status (Howard, 2013; Delpit 2012; Gorski, 2008). This promotes a positive classroom culture that is supportive of diverse learners (Delpit, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Ford & Moore, 2013). The tenor of classroom culture has a direct influence on students' behavior and on academic achievement (Commer & Emmons, 2006, Fryer & Dobbie, 2011; Reeves, 2000).

It is also important for educators to avoid making generalizations about students' cognitive abilities based on factors such as ethnicity and socioeconomic status (Gorski, 2008; Howard, 2013). Research indicates students' levels of academic achievement may be influenced by teacher perceptions of students' cognitive ability (Moore & Flowers, 2012). Therefore, it is important for students to know that teachers hold high expectations for their academic achievement.

Lastly, the research literature, as discussed in Chapter II, supports staff seeking to understand what opportunity gaps exist for the students they work with. Understanding what opportunity gaps exist for students allows the staff to: better assess the educational needs of students; reduce the negative influence of opportunity gaps by adjusting procedures and pedagogy to account for them; reduce discipline issues; and reduce the number of students erroneously placed in Special Education classrooms (Jones & Nichols, 2013; Toldson, 2008; Gorski, 2008).

5.4.2 Recommendations for Administrators

The findings of this study suggest that it is important for building-level administrators to support their schools in three key areas:

1. Promoting a positive school climate and culture
2. Assessing opportunity gaps students incur and establishing policies that mitigate the negative influences those opportunity gaps on students' academic achievement.

Promoting a positive school climate and culture minimizes distractions from factors such as behavior disruptions and sets the expectation that all students; are expected to learn; will act as good citizens; and will be treated with care and respect by all of the adults in the building. Research indicates that a positive school climate and culture correlate strongly with high levels of academic achievement (Comer & Emmons, 2006; Jones & Nichols, 2013; Dobbie & Fryer, 2011).

Just as with staff, administrators should seek to understand what opportunity gaps exist for the students in their schools. By understanding what opportunity gaps exist for students aids this helps administrators to: better assess the educational needs of students; reduce the negative influences of opportunity gaps by establishing policies that mitigate the negative influence of those gaps on students' academic achievement; reduce behavior issues, and reduce the number of students erroneously placed in special education classrooms (Jones & Nichols, 2013; Toldson, 2008; Gorski, 2008).

5.5 Limitations

All research methods have limitations. A multi-case study approach was chosen to investigate the aforementioned research questions in regards to the perceptions of staffs at four rural/town schools in South Carolina that served high poverty predominately ethnic minority student populations. This approach allowed the researcher to collect several forms of data in a variety of settings. The multi-case study approach also allowed for in-depth questioning of the study participants to confirm and clarify the findings that emerged from the survey instrument data. Lastly, collection of the data in multiple setting increased the credibility of the findings (McMillan, 2008).

Due to the small sample size of this research study, a primary limitation is that the results of this study cannot be generalized to other schools. The results of this study do not represent a generalization of all schools in South Carolina with similar demographic make-ups. Rather than provide a generalization of similar schools, this study provides a detailed analysis of the school climate & culture, *Strengths*, and *Areas for Improvement* as perceived by staff at the schools that participated in this study.

5.6 Suggestions for Future Research

Future research is of interest in a number of areas. Expanding the research to include a larger number of schools in South Carolina with similar demographics would generate findings that could be generalizable to other schools in the state and Southeastern United States. That would also increase the validity of the findings gleaned from such a study. This research method could also be applied to schools in different

settings. In addition, this research could be expanded to other parties such as parents and students to gain a broader perspective.

Another area for future study could be assessing the perceptions of high-level administrators and policy-makers. That research may increase understanding of how their perceptions of challenges faced by schools similar to those investigated in this study might influence the policy decisions they make.

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- National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities
<http://www.ncef.org/rl/rural.cfm?date=4>

APPENDICES

Appendix A

A Letter to the Participants



January 5, 2015

Dear [REDACTED]

My name is Justin Ballenger I am the co-investigator for a research study being conducted out of the College of Education at Clemson University. Dr. Roy Jones, Executive Director of the Call Me MISTER Program, is the principle investigator this study entitled, *Challenges to Growth and Meeting Student Population Needs*, Protocol # 2014-268.

I am writing to request your school's participation in this research study that will investigate the challenges faced by rural elementary schools with high levels of poverty and a high proportion of ethnic minorities. This study involves participation from faculty, staff, and administration at your school. Participants will complete two surveys that are used to assess school climate, school culture, and faculty/staff perceptions of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. This study will also include follow-up focus group sessions that will be used in the interpretation survey results.

The findings of this study will be used to inform researchers about the specific challenges faced by South Carolina's rural schools. If you would like to discuss specific details of your school's participation you may contact me at [REDACTED] or via email at bhorace@clemson.edu. Your participation in this study would be greatly appreciated and will benefit understanding of the specific challenges and needs of South Carolina's rural schools.

Best regards,

Mister H. Justin Ballenger, M.Ed.
PhD Candidate
Call MISTER Program
Eugene T. Moore School of Education
Clemson University
Bhorace@clemson.edu
[REDACTED]



CALL ME MISTER PROGRAM

Eugene T. Moore School of Education 202 Holtzendorff Clemson, SC 29634-0702A
864.656.4646. FAX 864.656.0875 TOLL FREE 1.800.640.2657

Appendix B

Comer School Climate (QUAN) Survey Items

Page 1 of 1

SCHOOL CLIMATE SURVEY

Revised Edition
(School Staff Version)

This survey is designed to get the opinions of all school staff concerning the general climate of the school. Your input is very important in helping to better understand the issues related to school climate. Your responses are strictly confidential and you will be identified in any way. Thank you for taking the time to respond.]

Please indicate your current position.*

- ☐ Classroom Teacher
- ☐ Paraprofessional
- ☐ Non-instructional professional staff
- ☐ Administrator
- ☐ Other

If you responded "Other" to the previous question please identify your role.

The principal sets the direction for this school.*

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Strongly Agree

Students at this school are willing to learn.*

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Strongly Agree

Students here fight a lot.*

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Strongly Agree

Parents rarely attend school activities.*

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Strongly Agree

Students at this school have good self control.*

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Strongly Agree

It is clear that principal facilitates and guides the management process in the school.*

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Strongly Agree

Non-teaching staff are given opportunities to express their views on important matters.*

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Strongly Agree

The walls of this school are normally in good condition.*

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Strongly Agree

Teachers are often disrespected by students.

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Strongly Agree

Students are treated the same regardless of race.*

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Strongly Agree

The behavior of children at this school is good.*

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Strongly Agree

This school is usually clean and tidy.*

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Strongly Agree

At this school, teachers help students feel good about themselves.*

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Strongly Agree

The principal has little contact with teachers.*

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Strongly Disagree

Our students are willing and eager to learn.*

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Strongly Agree

Staff at this school believe that very few of their students will make it to college.*

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Strongly Agree

There is good community involvement in the life of the school.*

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Strongly Agree

Our students are willing and eager to learn.*

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Strongly Agree

Staff at this school believe that very few of their students will make it to college.*

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Strongly Agree

There is good community involvement in the life of the school.*

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ Strongly Agree

Appendix C

Plus/Delta Evaluation (QUAL)

8/22/2014

Plus/Delta School Evaluation - Google Forms

Plus/Delta School Evaluation

The Plus/Delta School Evaluation is way of collecting information to better understand how various faculty/staff view the performance of the school. It is important that information be gathered from many different sources to have a true picture of performance. Each faculty/staff member will have the opportunity to complete a Plus (What Works) and Delta (Ideas for Improvement) that may be used for specifics to evaluate your school's performance. Please do not identify yourself in any way. All the information submitted by the faculty/staff will be used to inform a study of your schools' challenges of growth and meeting the needs of the student population. Responses may be typed directly into the form provided. This input is voluntary and NOT required.

* Required

1. Enter "PLUS" Items below. *

Things that your school does well.

2. Enter "DELTA" Items below. *

Things that your school could improve upon or change.

Powered by

 Google Forms  Google Forms

Appendix D

Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol

1. Welcome	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce yourself to the staff; Thank staff for participating • Ask staff to introduce themselves and indicate their roles in the school • Give a brief description of the study • Thank the staff for their participation
2. Ground Rules	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collect consent forms and distribute forms if any staff have not completed • Remind staff that participation in the study is optional • Remind staff that the interview will be recorded • Explain that audio recording will be used for transcription (use the IRB form as a guide) • Inform the staff that the recording will be destroyed after transcription • Remind the staff that they do not have to respond to any questions they feel uncomfortable responding to • Remind staff of option to submit notes using Google Apps • Inform the group that recording of the session will begin • Begin recording the interview • *Remember to designate which school you are recording (1, 2, 3, or 4)
3. Group Discussion - Topic 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you were to describe the climate in your school in two sentences or less, what would you say? • How would you characterize the greatest strengths of your school? • How would you characterize the Areas for Improvement in your school? • What do you believe the greatest challenge to academic achievement for students in your school is? • *(Remember to ask probing questions)
3. Group Discussion - Topic 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review findings of QUAN & QUAL instruments for the school • Identify top 2 Strengths and Top 2 Areas for Improvement • Do you agree with this assessment of your school's strengths and areas for improvement? • *(Remember to ask probing questions)
Group Discussion - Topic 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distribute list of variables measured by the study instruments • Which if any of the factors on the list contributes most to success in your school? • Which if any of the factors on the list contributes presents the greatest challenge in your school? • *(Remember to ask probing questions)
7. Final thoughts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there any additional comments that you believe would contribute to gaining a better understanding of the overall character of your school? • *(Remember to ask probing questions & ask clarifying questions) • Stop recording • *Make sure to save audio file in the correct folder and designate the school number
8. Wrap-up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thank participants for their time • Inform participants that the study data will be made available to their school in aggregate form and that they will be notified of any publications related to the findings of the study • Collect any outstanding consent forms
Post-interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Archive Data field notes • Make sure audio levels are adjusted

Appendix E

Interview Code Worksheets

Interview Coding Worksheet

	Comments Include variable alignment (1- 10) & category alignment (+, Δ, or Ø) (i.e. "Positive comment about the facilities" (7)(+))
Discussion 1	
Discussion 2	
Discussion 3	
Discussion 4	

Code Book	
Variable	Category
1 = Achievement Motivation	(+) Strength
2 = Collaborative Decision-Making	
3 = Equity and Fairness	(Δ) Area for Improvement
4 = Leadership	
5 = Order and Discipline	(Ø) Neutral
6 = School Building	
7 = School/Parent/Community Relations	
8 = Staff Dedication to Student Learning	
9 = Staff Expectations	
10 = Other	

Appendix F IRB Consent Forms

Disserations Study – Faculty Perceptions of Challenges to Growth and Meeting Student Population Needs Protocol #: 2014-268

RESEARCH SUBJECT INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Prospective Research Subject: Read this consent form carefully and ask as many questions as you like before you decide whether you want to participate in this research study. You are free to ask questions at any time before, during, or after your participation in this research.

Project Information	
Project Title: Disserations Study – Challenges to of Growth and Meeting Student Population Needs	Project Number:
Site IRB Number:	Dr. Roy Jones
Principal Investigator: Dr. Roy Jones	Organization: Eugene T. Moore School of Education
Location: 203 Holtzendorff, Clemson University	Phone: 864.656.4646
Other Investigators: Justin Ballenger, Dr. Robert Knoppel, Dr. Lienne Medford, Dr. James Moore	Organization: : Eugene T. Moore School of Education
Location: 203 Holtzendorff Hall, Clemson University	Phone: 864.656.4646

1. PURPOSE OF THIS RESEARCH STUDY

You are being asked to participate in a research study designed to find out more regarding the challenges faced by elementary schools in educating their respective student populations.

2. PROCEDURES

- o Faculty & Staff at the schools involved in the study will complete surveys regarding various characteristics of the schools they work in and participate in focus groups.
- o Focus group sessions will be audio recorded by the researchers.
- o Photographs of the school and focus group sessions will be taken and they may be used in future academic presentations. Individuals pictured will

have facial features blurred before inclusion in academic presentations.

3. POSSIBLE RISKS OR DISCOMFORT

There are no risks posed to the participants in this study.

4. BENEFITS

The study will add to research literature that is available in regards to rural schools with high proportions of students living in poverty and a high proportion of students of color. The study will also provide recommendations for increasing student achievement based on the study findings.

5. CONFIDENTIALITY

We will do everything we can to protect your privacy and confidentiality. We will not tell anybody outside of the research team that you were in this study or what information we collected about you in particular. Your identity in this study will be treated as confidential. The results of the study, including survey or any other data, may be published for research purposes but we will not give your name or include any identifiable references to you. Audio recordings will be destroyed immediately following transcription of the recordings, which should occur within 4 months of the original recording date. Pictures that are not included in academic presentation will be destroyed with 12 months.

6. TERMINATION OF RESEARCH STUDY/CHOOSING TO BE IN THE STUDY

You are free to choose whether or not to participate in this study. There will be no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled if you choose not to participate. You will be provided with any significant new findings developed during the course of this study that may relate to or influence your willingness to continue participation. In the event you decide to discontinue your participation in the study,

- Please notify (Justin Ballenger bhorace@clermson.edu telephone 864.656.4646.) of your decision.

7. CONTACT INFORMATION

Any further questions you have about this study will be answered by the Research coordinator

- Name: Justin Ballenger
Phone Number: 864.656.4646

If you have any questions or concerns about your rights in this research study, please contact the Clemson University Office of Research Compliance (ORC) at 864-656-6460 or irb@clermson.edu. If you are outside of the Upstate South Carolina area, please use the ORC's toll-free number, 866-297-3071.



Protocol# 2014-268

CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

I consent to participating in the project research entitled: "Faculty & Staff Perceptions of Challenges to Growth and Meeting Student Population Needs."

Dr. Roy I. Jones, Principal Investigator, or his authorized representative, Mr. Justin Ballenger, has explained the purpose of the study, the procedures to be followed, and the expected duration of my participation. Possible benefits of the study have been described, as have alternative procedures, if such procedures are applicable and available.

I acknowledge that I have had the opportunity to obtain additional information regarding the study and that any questions I have raised have been answered to my full satisfaction. Furthermore, I understand that I am free to withdraw consent at any time and to discontinue participation in the study without prejudice to me.

I understand that the interview will be audiotaped and give my consent for taping. ☐Yes ☐No

Finally, I acknowledge that I have read and fully understand the consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy has been given to me.

Date: _____

Signed: _____
(Participant)

Signed: _____

Witness: _____



CALL ME MISTER PROGRAM

Eugene T. Moore School of Education 202 Holtzendorff Clemson, SC 29634-0702A

864.656.4646 FAX 864.656.0875 TOLL FREE 1.800.640.2657

Clemson University Authorization for Use of Photographic/Image/Video/Voice Recording

Program Name: Clemson University "Faculty & Staff Perceptions of Challenges to Growth and Meeting Student Population Needs." Protocol # 2014-268

Dates of Program: 12/8/2014 – 05/31/2015

Clemson University Contact: Mr. Justin Ballenger

Participant's Name: _____

PLEASE READ THIS DOCUMENT CAREFULLY. It affects the rights you may have concerning the use by Clemson University of any photographs, video, images or voice recording taken of you during the program identified above.

I, _____ hereby grant permission to Clemson University and its representatives and employees to take photographs or videos of me, to make recordings of my voice, and to obtain a transcript of my spoken or written words during my participation in the Clemson University _____. I give Clemson University permission to use these images, recordings, and spoken or written comments, as well as my name, likeness, voice and biographical information as follows:

1. To copy, reproduce, distribute, modify, display and perform.
2. To use in composite or modified forms in any media, now known or later developed, including but not limited to publications, newspapers, television, radio, sound track recording, motion picture, filmstrip, still photograph, the Internet, the world wide web, or any transcript.
3. For purposes including but not limited to education, research, trade, advertising, and promotion of the project throughout the world and in perpetuity.

I agree that I will receive no further consideration, other than that already received, for these uses and that Clemson University owns all rights to the images and recordings. I waive the right to inspect or approve uses of the images, recordings or written copies.

I hereby release Clemson University, its representatives, agents, employees and assigns from any claims that may arise from these uses, including claims of defamation, invasion of privacy, or rights of publicity or copyright. This release is binding on me, my heirs, assigns and estate and represents the entire agreement between me and Clemson University regarding the matters herein.

I agree that Clemson University is not obligated to use any of the rights granted under this Agreement.

Participant's Signature

Date

Appendix G

IRB Approval



Justin Ballenger <bhorace@g.clemson.edu>

Validation of IRB2014-268: Challenges of Growth and Meeting Student Population Needs

2 messages

Nalinee Patin <NPATIN@clemson.edu>

Mon, Dec 8, 2014 at 12:32 PM

To: Roy Jones <ROYJ@clemson.edu>, Justin Ballenger <bhorace@g.clemson.edu>

Dear Dr. Jones and Mr. Ballenger,

The chair of the Clemson University Institutional Review Board (IRB) validated the protocol identified above using exempt review procedures and a determination was made on December 8, 2014 that the proposed activities involving human participants qualify as Exempt under category B2, based on federal regulations 45 CFR 46. You initially submitted an expedited application, but the reviewer determined that it qualified for exemption. The adult release form and approved consent document are attached. **Your protocol will expire on May 31, 2015.**

Please note that we will need an e-mail or signed approval letter from the schools before you can begin recruiting or data collection at that site. Please refer to our guidance on research site letters for more information, http://media.clemson.edu/research/compliance/irb/research_site_letters.pdf.

The expiration date indicated above was based on the completion date you entered on the IRB application. If an extension is necessary, the PI should submit an Exempt Protocol Extension Request form, <http://www.clemson.edu/research/compliance/irb/forms.html>, at least three weeks before the expiration date. Please refer to our website for more information on the extension procedures, <http://www.clemson.edu/research/compliance/irb/guidance/reviewprocess.html>.

No change in this approved research protocol can be initiated without the IRB's approval. This includes any proposed revisions or amendments to the protocol or consent form. Any unanticipated problems involving risk to subjects, any complications, and/or any adverse events must be reported to the Office of Research Compliance (ORC) immediately. All team members are required to review the "Responsibilities of Principal Investigators" and the "Responsibilities of Research Team Members" available at <http://www.clemson.edu/research/compliance/irb/regulations.html>.

The Clemson University IRB is committed to facilitating ethical research and protecting the rights of human subjects. Please contact us if you have any questions and use the IRB number and title in all communications regarding this study.

Good luck with your study.

All the best,

Nalinee

Nalinee D. Patin

IRB Coordinator

Clemson University

Office of Research Compliance

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Voice: (864) 656-0636


Fax: (864) 656-4475


E-mail: npatin@clemson.edu

Web site: <http://www.clemson.edu/research/compliance/irb/>

IRB E-mail: irb@clemson.edu

2 attachments

 **IRB2014_268_Jones_consent_rev2.docx**
21K

 **Adult_Participants_Release_Form.doc**
30K

Justin Ballenger <bhorace@g.clemson.edu>
To: Nalinee Patin <NPATIN@clemson.edu>
Cc: Roy Jones <ROYJ@clemson.edu>

Mon, Dec 8, 2014 at 1:26 PM

Thank you Ms. Patin!

Mister H. Justin Ballenger, M.Ed.
PhD Candidate
Call MISTER Program
Eugene T. Moore School of Education
Clemson University
Bhorace@clemson.edu

[Quoted text hidden]

<IRB2014_268_Jones_consent_rev2.docx>

<Adult_Participants_Release_Form.doc>